

Hospital-based Mental Health - Building relationships, integrating care, breaking barriers: Advancing Hepatitis C Care

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Background:

People living with mental health challenges experience disproportionately high rates of chronic hepatitis C (HCV) compared to the general population. There are many contributing factors such as substance use, stigma, clinician knowledge as well as limited access to coordinated care contribute to under-diagnosis and poor treatment engagement. Despite advances in treatment, many remain undiagnosed and untreated. Integrating screening and treatment within mental health inpatients settings presents an opportunity to address this significant gap for a vulnerable population.

Analysis: To explore innovative, nurse-led approaches to HCV screening, treatment, and linkage to care within Victorian public mental health services, and to identify strategies that support equitable access for this vulnerable population.

Results: Implementation of nurse-led screening and treatment pathways led to increased identification of people living with chronic HCV, improved linkage to specialist's care, and enhanced staff confidence in discussing blood-borne virus risk and treatment options. Collaborative models between mental health and viral hepatitis services proved critical to sustaining engagement and achieving care outcomes.

Conclusions: Embedding HCV care within mental health settings effectively bridges long-standing service gaps. Nurse-led, collaborative models increase screening rates, support treatment completion, and contribute to Australia's hepatitis C elimination goals while promoting health equity for people experiencing mental health challenges.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

"Austin Health's mental health division and department of gastroenterology and hepatology recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We thank the mental health staff who participated in this research. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations."