

Analysis of prisoners treated for Hepatitis C and outcomes of treatment, in Perth South Metro Prisons 2024 - 2025

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Background/Approach: Hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment had been offered for many years in West Australian (WA) prisons by different providers. A report on prescription numbers is sent to the WA Department of Health, but previously there was no analysis of epidemiology or treatment outcomes. Mostly sentenced prisoners were treated prior to 2024. HCV is ideally detected by screening on entry to prison (within 14 days), but does not always occur. In 2023 the “Aus Hep Study” found a concerning 23% HCV prevalence in Casuarina prison (the largest men’s prison in WA).

Analysis/Argument: The aim of knowing the proportion of treatments that were successful, and the factors or barriers to this, could lead to changes to enhance treatments. Prisoners are supposed to access the same treatments as the community, so remand prisoners began to be offered treatment in 2024.

Outcome/Results: Four metro prisons studied took 40% of the total WA prisoner population. In 2024 a new HCV nurse position was created covering the 4 prisons but unfortunately only lasted 6 months, and was not replaced. Subsequently mid 2025 a Casuarina prison nurse was reallocated to HCV management, preparing patients for scripting by in-house doctors. Following these two initiatives the numbers of prisoners treated increased considerably, and follow-up improved. The treatment of remand prisoners had similar treatment completion rates (70%) compared to sentenced patients (76%) and similar Sustained Viral Response (SVR).

Conclusions/Applications: Treatment of HCV has an excellent success rate. The barriers were early release from prison, ceasing medication, use of shared infected needles while using illicit drugs, (no clean needles are available in prisons), and barriers to Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST). The acquisition of HCV in prison, or reinfection after treatment, is disappointing. Testing for HCV on entry will be improved with Rapid Point of Care testing in 2026 and access to OST is being reviewed.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Nil