

“I LOVE NOT BEING INFECTIOUS...”: PERCEPTIONS OF HEPATITIS C CURE POST DAA TREATMENT

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Background:

Since 2016, 20% of Australians with hepatitis C have been cured using direct acting antiviral (DAAs); 200,000 people still have hepatitis C, many of whom would benefit from treatment. However, the number of people presenting for treatment is plateauing. For most, hepatitis C does not have a significant impact on their daily lives given it is largely asymptomatic. This study examined the meaning attached to being cured of hepatitis C and seeks to inform strategies that could support others to engage in treatment.

Methods:

This study used semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of people with hepatitis C taking DAAs accessing both hospital and community-based clinics. Interviews were conducted at the 12 week post-treatment visit, when participants received their cure result. The interview explored participants’ experiences of living with hepatitis C, their reasons for seeking treatment, and their experience of the DAAs. Participants also reflected on the meaning of being cured, and how they communicated with their peers. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and key themes were identified using inductive thematic analysis.

Results:

Twenty participants were interviewed. Participants discussed the physical health benefits of being cured, however, their improved sense of psychological wellbeing had the most significant impact. Participants described their relief about no longer being infectious and their reduced anxiety about developing liver disease and cancer. Participants who had injected drugs in the past, described being cured as a way to break the connection to their past.

Conclusion:

No longer feeling “infectious” reduced participants’ psychological distress, as did the physical benefits of being cured, namely the reduced risk of developing liver disease and cancer. Future strategies targeting people with hepatitis C who are not engaged with the health system need to highlight the substantial psychological, as well as physical health benefits, offered by achieving a cure.

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