

Patient Perspectives on Barriers and Enablers to a Treatment For All Approach for Hepatitis B

M Ahad^{1,2}, J Wallace^{1,3}, B Whitton⁴, S Glasgow⁴, D Moussa^{1,5}, A Thompson^{4,5}, A Wade^{1,2}, J Doyle^{1,2,5,6}, J Howell^{1,2,4,5}

¹Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, ²Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, ³La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, ⁴St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, ⁵The University of Melbourne, Melbourne Australia,
⁶The Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

Contact: marvad.ahad@burnet.edu.au

Background

- Approximately **254 million people** are living with hepatitis B worldwide. In 2022, less than 3% of people worldwide were receiving antiviral treatment.¹
- The recent WHO updated hepatitis B treatment guidelines saw the expansion of hepatitis B treatment eligibility.²
- There have been calls to **expand treatment criteria**, including calls for adopting a treatment for all (treat-all) approach.³
- No studies to date have investigated the **acceptability** of a **treat-all approach** among **people with hepatitis B**.
- Research Aim:** This qualitative study aimed to explore **patient perceptions** of hepatitis B treatment and opinions on a **treat-all approach**.

Methods

- Twenty-three **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with patients from a metropolitan gastroenterology clinic in Melbourne, Australia.
- Of the interviewed participants, 13 were female and 10 were male, and 21 patients were born in countries other than Australia (the most common country being Vietnam) and 2 were born in Australia.
- Participants were aged between 33 and 69 years.
- Data from semi-structured interviews were **thematically analysed**.

Results and Discussion

The process of hepatitis B treatment has psycho-social implications

"Physically you can give a person a pill to treat their disease, but psychologically, socially, you cannot." (P20)



Belief in the role of medication and early intervention

- Medication is seen a normal part of the clinical experience



Perceived seriousness of hepatitis B and fear of complications

- Decision seen as a balance of risks: possibility of liver damage or cancer, but taking medication is low risk



Positive mindset as a motivator

- Optimism/pessimism is thought to impact decision



Trust in medical professionals

- Patients would base the decision on medical advice



Family support

- Family support is a factor in decision-making

Cost and access to medication

- Cost is a major consideration, especially given the cost might be a lifelong commitment.



Taking medication has negative effects on self-perception

- Being on medication is confirmation that one is ill, which brings distress and should be used as a last resort



Perceived culture of overmedicalisation

- Belief that there exists an overreliance on medication



Trust in medical professionals

- Patients do not feel they have enough information about antiviral medication and its effects



Belief that 'natural' therapies are superior

- Belief that antiviral medication is less effective



Conclusions

- With cure for hepatitis B being a future possibility, exploring patient acceptability of a treat-all approach is crucial preparatory work. The **patient needs** highlighted in this work should be **embedded into models of hepatitis B care**.
- These include acknowledging the psychological and social implications involved with hepatitis B treatment, adequate support during this process, improved access to hepatitis B education material and encouragement of active patient involvement in treatment decisions.

References

1. Global hepatitis report 2024: action for access in low- and middle-income countries. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
2. Guidelines for the prevention, diagnosis, care and treatment for people with chronic hepatitis B infection. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
3. Halford R, Adda D, Hicks J, et al. Time for a treat all approach for hepatitis B. Lancet Gastroenterol Hepatol 2024;9:688.