

Hepatitis C: Can community pharmacy do more than dispensing?

Authors:

Devkota A¹, Dong K¹, Dabhadatta J¹

¹HIV and Related Programs, Western Sydney Local Health District, ²The University of Sydney, School of Medicine and Health

Introduction: Providing hepatitis C care in community where people are accessing services have been proven to facilitate greater engagement. HIV and Related Programs, Western Sydney Local Health District, and Westmead Hospital Storr Liver team implemented a successful outreach van project targeting Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) pharmacies in western Sydney. Community pharmacists are well-positioned to raise awareness, provide education, assist with treatment, and decrease discrimination associated with hepatitis C. Building capacity and raising awareness for pharmacists can be influential for engaging with hard-to-reach clients attending OST pharmacies, and improve referral to the outreach van for testing and treatment.

Methods: The project incorporated an innovative model of care involving collaboration with community pharmacies and linking to health promotion and clinical services. The initiative mapped out over 60 OST community pharmacies in western Sydney. One of the key components of the project was to provide education to pharmacists. The plan was to develop and implement an Australian Pharmacy Council accredited hepatitis and harm reduction education with an aim to build their capacity on identifying at-risk populations for hepatitis C assessment, follow-up and management.

Results: The project provided education to over 40 pharmacists. The session increased interests of pharmacy stakeholders. Subsequently, four additional pharmacies signed up to be part of the project. The capacity building of pharmacists and strong collaborations were found to be instrumental in breaking the barriers and stigma for testing and treatment. The project enticed a large number hepatitis C screening with high positivity rate, improved follow-up, and placed significant percentage of people into treatment through OST pharmacies.

Conclusion: Community pharmacists can certainly play an indispensable role in hepatitis C management when provided with capacity building and awareness training. Their non-discriminatory client interactions can improve linkage to care. This sustainable collaboration approach can help achieve NSW hepatitis C elimination goals.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: None.