LIFE AND LOSS IN THE RACE TO ELIMINATION: WHAT DOES VIRAL ELIMINATION POTENTIATE AND WHAT DOES IT LEAVE BEHIND?

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In 2016 the World Health Organization set a goal to eliminate viral hepatitis as a major public health threat by 2030. The 'race to elimination' is rapidly changing the hepatitis C landscape, with a range of effects for how the health of people living with hepatitis C is governed, and for how evidence-making, interventions and policy are done. Drawing on thinking in the field of science and technology studies concerned with loss of species, in this paper we explore the viral elimination era in a new way. Through analysis of in-depth interviews (n=43) with researchers, modellers, implementation scientists, global health advocates and policy makers, we explore the complex processes of 'viral elimination' and consider what it means, how it comes to matter socially and materially, and to whom. Paying attention to implementation, intervention, evidence-making and policy practices, we begin to map how hepatitis C elimination is experienced, resisted, measured, enunciated and performed, affecting how the 'life' and 'loss' of hepatitis C is governed in different ways. This brings us to ask: What is altered as a virus is eliminated? What is made better or worse in the communities in which this occurs? What relations are made possible or extinguished? And, what does it mean to care and intervene in an elimination era? Thinking this way troubles the separation of the biomedical and the social and opens up examination of viral elimination not only as a singular biomedical event but as phenomenon inextricably and simultaneously biomedical and social, as well as cultural, biological, political and economic. This paper therefore offers an initial mapping of what is made possible, and what is left behind, in the race towards achieving hepatitis C elimination targets.

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