

South Western Sydney Local Health District , Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) Community Pharmacy Hep C DBS Testing Project.

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Background: Tertiary drug and alcohol services with a daily model of Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) administration have traditionally proved a reliable constant for high yield Hepatitis C screening and treatment. The adoption of long-acting injectable OAT therapy and the coinciding client movement to Community Pharmacy dispensing, contributed to infrequent HCV/HIV testing access for people with ongoing HCV risk.

Method: Between June 2023 and September 2024, the South Western Sydney Drug Health Services (SWSDHS) and HARP Health Promotion Service collaborated to conduct Dry Blood Spot testing of people at high caseload OAT Community Pharmacies.

thirteen community pharmacies participated, comprising 21 testing events. The model was to test all people >16 years old presenting for opioid replacement therapy. A Health Promotion officer and a Drug Health/Hepatitis NSW Peer Worker staffed the project. A \$30.00 supermarket voucher incentive was offered. All negative results were notified via text message and HCV RNA detected results were advised by phone with a treatment discussion.

Results: 261 people were tested. 19 (7.3%) returned a Detected HCV RNA result. 8 (42%) commenced HCV Direct-Acting Antiviral (DAA) treatment, 5 with Drug Health Services, 2 with their General Practitioner and a cirrhotic client through the Hospital Gastroenterology & Liver service. Four previously DAA-treated people received their Sustained Virological Response (SVR) result opportunistically through the testing.

Conclusion: High caseload OAT community pharmacies represent an opportunity to engage with untreated HCV RNA-detected people in a familiar and trusted environment. DAA treatment can easily be dispensed with OAT and adherence monitored on site. Pharmacies are a good forum for Harm Reduction and contemporary DAA messaging reaching isolated or poorly informed people. The lower-than-expected treatment uptake needs further review. With only approximately 12.5% of SWSLHD OAT Community Pharmacy clients screened, the project findings warrant further site expansion.