



Hepatitis C Care for The Vulnerable

Many people are not aware of their hepatitis C status.

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Offering hepatitis C treatment when and where people are diagnosed increases the likelihood of a cure, but there's still room for improvement. Hepatitis C virus (HCV) can be easily treated with an 8- or 12-week course of direct-acting antiviral therapy, but many people are not aware of their status, and only a third have been successfully treated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Researchers at the University of California San Francisco analyzed a new model of HCV care in the No One Waits study. They recruited participants to a neighborhood testing site via street outreach that targeted people experiencing homelessness and people who inject drugs, offering small cash payments as an incentive. Participants were screened for HCV antibodies. People who tested positive had a follow-up HCV RNA test, and those with active infection received a two-week starter pack of Epclusa (sofosbuvir/velpatasvir) tablets. They returned every two weeks for three months to get more medication, and study staff delivered meds to those who didn't show up.

Of the 492 people who were initially screened, half were HVC antibody positive, and 111 (23%) had active infection. Of these, 89 returned for their HCV RNA results, and all but two started treatment. People were lost at several points along the care continuum, but among those who completed treatment and follow-up testing, 84% were cured.

"Offering hepatitis C treatment at the point of diagnosis streamlines care, saving both time and money," says lead study author Meghan Morris, PhD, MPH. What's more, delivering care in nonclinical settings, such as shelters and libraries, could help tackle stigma, a major barrier to achieving a cure.

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