KEEPING PEOPLE HEALTHY

Elimination of Hepatitis C in a Prison Setting

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network

Challenge

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) in NSW prisons is 20 – 30 times higher than in the community. In March 2016 new medications presented an opportunity to eliminate HCV in a prison; the Compulsory Drug Treatment Program (CDTP). This was an approach that had not been considered and a challenge which could not be underestimated. The aims of concurrent treatment commencement with harm minimisation education were viewed as important measures to eliminate the pool of virus and reduce re-infection risk. The project aligned with the Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network Strategic Plan 2013-2017 and the NSW Hepatitis C Strategy 2014-2020.

Solution

In July 2016, following cross-government, collaborative planning between JH&FMHN, Corrective Services NSW and NGO Hepatitis NSW, all CDTP patients were reviewed for HCV risk factors (n=58) and patients with risk factors were screened (n=54). Of these, 18 patients had chronic HCV and commenced treatment. All stakeholders respected competing priorities in planning and throughout the project. Furthermore the project took careful consideration with regard to patient's CDTP rehabilitation demands and introducing new HCV medications.

Results

In September 2016 all 18 patients (100%) achieved End of Treatment (EOT) Response, 15 patients (83%) achieved Sustained Virologic Response (SVR) or 'cure', and three patients (17%) were released before SVR assessment. Following treatment patients reported improved wellbeing. Longer term benefits include significantly decreasing the risk of hepatocellular carcinoma and death. Planning is underway to replicate the model in similar sized correctional centres as part of the state-wide Hepatitis in Prisons Elimination (HIPE) program.

Acknowledgements

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (JH&FMHN)
Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)
Hepatitis NSW – A Non-Government Organisation