

# Targeted and comprehensive intervention is vital for hepatitis C elimination

Elimination of hepatitis C requires effective engagement of people who inject drugs. A targeted comprehensive approach which includes facilitated access to health services and harm reduction strategies is vital.

## THE ISSUE

New curative hepatitis C treatments can halt the progression of liver disease in people with chronic infection, stopping liver-related deaths. In addition, if we treat people involved in ongoing transmission, new infections can be stopped, and elimination of hepatitis C as a public health threat becomes possible. In high-income countries, people who inject drugs (PWID) are at greatest risk of being infected with hepatitis C.<sup>1</sup>

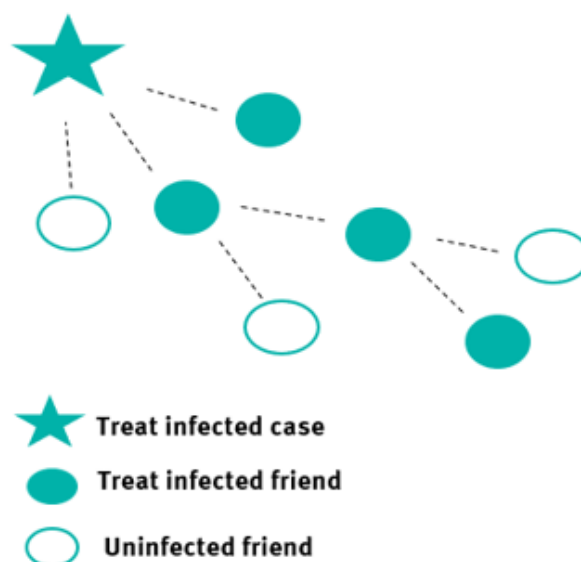
## WHAT OUR WORK FOUND

In an editorial in the leading journal *Hepatology*, Professor Hellard and colleagues outlined key considerations for the elimination of hepatitis C:

- ▶ Successful hepatitis C care for PWID must include more than just effective drug treatment. Regular screening and counselling, opiate substitution programs and needle and syringe programs are important adjuncts.
- ▶ Hepatitis C transmission can be substantially reduced, even if only a small proportion (~60/1000) PWID are treated for hepatitis C infection each year (treatment as prevention). Over 10 years, hepatitis C incidence and prevalence will fall, leading to hepatitis C elimination.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Treating the immediate contacts of infected individuals (a 'treat your friends' approach) can improve efficiency of hepatitis C treatment from the point of view of both prevalence and cost.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Harm reduction strategies such as opioid substitution programs and needle and syringe programs can reduce further hepatitis C transmission amongst PWID.
- ▶ Community-based settings or opioid substitution clinics can facilitate hepatitis C assessment and treatment; upscaling of resources, including infrastructure, workforce and education, is required to optimise this approach.

### References

1. Nelson P, et al. *Lancet* 2011; 378: 571-583
2. Martin N, et al. *Hepatology* 2013; 58:1598-1609
3. Rollis D, et al. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 2012; 297: 73-87



Diagrammatic representation of 'treat your friends'

## Policy Implications

- ▶ Effective engagement of people who inject drugs is critical for hepatitis C elimination.
- ▶ A comprehensive approach to hepatitis C care should include harm reduction measures, easy access to hepatitis C testing and treatment, adequate health delivery resources, and strategic targeting of not just PWID but their injecting partners.

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