



Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information

La source canadienne
de renseignements sur
le VIH et l'hépatite C

From *TreatmentUpdate* 221

Services for people with HCV who use homeless shelters

Researchers in Brighton, England, have found that some homeless people are at increased risk for liver disease. Unfortunately, in the experience of the researchers, this vulnerable population may be reluctant to engage with hospital-based services, where monitoring and care of liver diseases usually take place.

To help remedy this problem, the Brighton researchers established a liver monitoring and care service located in the community that focused on people 40 years and older. Specifically, in late 2015, the researchers, together with doctors and nurses, established a liver care service at two major hostels that catered to homeless people aged 40 and up. At these mini-clinics each participant was asked to do the following:

- a brief survey about their use of alcohol and street drugs
- screening for blood-borne viruses
- specialized ultrasound scans of the liver (Fibroscans)

If participants were found to have chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection and/or significant liver injury arising from HCV infection, they were offered treatment.

So far researchers have enrolled 84 people whose key features at the time of enrollment in the liver care service were as follows:

- 79% men, 21% women
- average age - 51 years
- underlying drivers of liver injury were excessive intake of alcohol, chronic HCV infection or both. About 45% of participants disclosed that they had become addicted to alcohol.
- 68% of participants disclosed that they had mental health issues
- 77% of participants disclosed that they had used or currently used street drugs

HCV and liver assessments

- 36 participants (43%) had HCV infection
- 27% of participants had what the researchers termed "clinically significant" levels of liver injury
- 18% had severely injured livers

Putting it all together

The present study of the liver care service should be considered preliminary. However, it shows that a high proportion of people (97%) who use homeless shelters in Brighton are willing to engage in liver care when services are located in the community for their use.

The researchers used Fibroscans to reveal the extent of liver injury in participants. The researchers found that these machines were "perceived [by participants] to be a powerful tool that facilitated patient engagement."

The researchers encouraged health authorities in other regions to "replicate" their model of providing services to older and vulnerable homeless adults.

At present, only a small proportion of people have started HCV therapy. The researchers will provide an update on the safety and effectiveness of treatment in the future.

Some people with relatively uncomplicated mental health issues are also looked after by clinicians affiliated with the study. However, people with complex mental health conditions and substance use issues are referred to other clinics

that specialize in such care.

—Sean R. Hosein

REFERENCE:

Hashim A, Worthley T, Macken L, et al. Enhancing detection and treatment of chronic hepatitis C related liver disease in vulnerable adults through a dedicated homeless hostel-based liver service: Vulnerable Adults Liver Disease Study. In: Program and abstracts of the *International Liver Congress* , 19-23 April 2017, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Poster 179.

Produced By:



Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information

555 Richmond Street West, Suite 505, Box 1104
Toronto, Ontario M5V 3B1 Canada
Phone: 416.203.7122
Toll-free: 1.800.263.1638
Fax: 416.203.8284
www.catie.ca
Charitable registration number: 13225 8740 RR

Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

CATIE provides information resources to help people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

CATIE endeavours to provide the most up-to-date and accurate information at the time of publication. However, information changes and users are encouraged to ensure they have the most current information. Users relying solely on this information do so entirely at their own risk. Neither CATIE nor any of its partners or funders, nor any of their employees, directors, officers or volunteers may be held liable for damages of any kind that may result from the use or misuse of any such information. Any opinions expressed herein or in any article or publication accessed or published or provided by CATIE may not reflect the policies or opinions of CATIE or any partners or funders.

Information on safer drug use is presented as a public health service to help people make healthier choices to reduce the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other infections. It is not intended to encourage or promote the use or possession of illegal drugs.

Permission to Reproduce

This document is copyrighted. It may be reprinted and distributed in its entirety for non-commercial purposes without prior permission, but permission must be obtained to edit its content. The following credit must appear on any reprint: *This information was provided by CATIE (the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange). For more information, contact CATIE at 1.800.263.1638.*

© CATIE

Production of this content has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Available online at:
<http://www.catie.ca/en/treatmentupdate/treatmentupdate-221/hepatitis-c-virus/services-people-hcv-who-use-homeless-shelters>