



HepLink: Integrating Hepatitis C Treatment in Primary Care

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BACKGROUND

In Ireland, general practice is increasingly providing long-term care, including opioid substitution treatment (OST), for people who inject drugs, 62%-81% of whom are infected with HCV. Complex barriers mean few have received HCV treatment.

The HepLink study aims to improve HCV care outcomes among OST patients in general practice by developing an integrated model of HCV care and evaluating its feasibility, acceptability and likely efficacy.

METHODS

The **integrated model of care** comprises of:

- Education of community practitioners;
- Outreach of a HCV trained nurse into GP practices (Fig 2);
- Enhanced access of patients to community-based evaluation of their HCV disease (including Fibroscan).

OST-prescribing GP practices in North Dublin were recruited from the professional networks of the research team to participate.

Patients were eligible to participate if ≥ 18 years of age, on OST, and attend the practice during the recruitment period.

RESULTS

14 GP practices and 135 patients were recruited to the study.

Baseline data on demographics and HCV care processes were extracted from the clinical records of 133 patients (Table 1).

100 patients were clinically assessed by the HepLink nurse; 45 HCV antibody positive (Ab+) patients were fibroscanned (Fig 3).

Table 1: Patient Characteristics at Baseline (N=133)

Variable	N	%
Gender: Male	95	71.4%
Female	38	28.6%
Age: Mean (sd)	43 (7.6)	
Range	27-71	
Screened for HCV	123	92.5%
HCV antibody positive	95	71.4%
Referred to secondary care	62	46.6%
Attended secondary care	50	37.6%
Initiated HCV treatment	14	10.5%

Figure 2: Nurse Intervention Flowchart

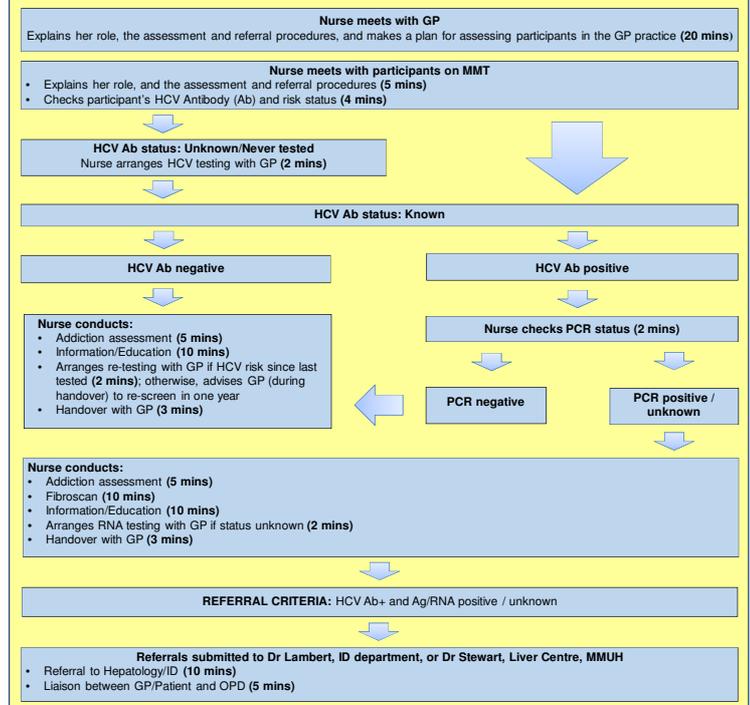
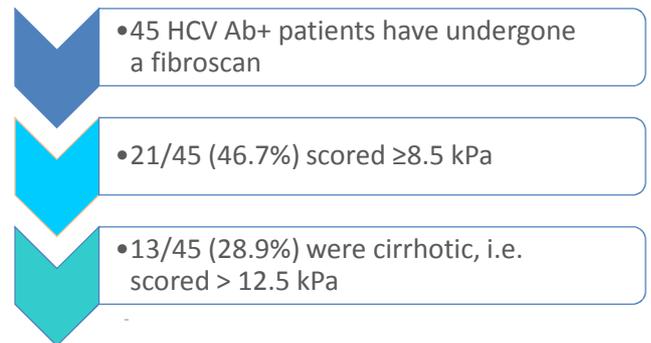


Figure 3: Fibroscan Results



DISCUSSION

- Most patients (92.5%) on OST had been screened for HCV infection at some time.
- A substantial proportion (47.4%) of HCV-positive patients had never attended hepatology/infectious diseases.
- Only 14.7% of HCV-positive patients had ever initiated HCV treatment.
- 28.9% of Ab+ patients fibroscanned were cirrhotic.
- There is a need to develop strategies to facilitate linkage to HCV evaluation and treatment among this population.

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Website: <http://www.ucd.ie/medicine/hepcare/>



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