

HAVING MORE HIV INFECTED NETWORK MEMBERS IN CARE IS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED HCV TREATMENT UPTAKE AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

Falade-Nwulia O¹, Sacamano P², Yang C², Thomas D¹, Sulkowski M¹, Latkin C², Mehta S²

Background: People who inject drugs (PWID) have high rates of hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV infection. Oral direct acting agents (DAA) of short duration with minimal side effects lead to HCV cure in over 95% of people. However, HCV treatment uptake among PWID remains low; social network members (NMs) have the potential to increase uptake.

Methods: The AIDS linked to the IntraVenous Experience (ALIVE) cohort follows PWID in Baltimore. Egocentric network data assessing characteristics of PWID networks was collected using a network inventory. HCV/HIV status were determined from antibody results. HCV treatment uptake was defined as self-report of treatment initiation. Logistic regression was used to assess the association between individual/network factors and HCV treatment uptake.

Results: Among 265 HCV-infected PWID, the median age was 59 (IQR 51-60) years, 68% were male, majority were Black (86%), 36% were HIV co-infected, and 26% reported injection drug use in the past 30 days. Only 42 (16%) reported a history of HCV treatment. Treated participants were likely to be older (mean age 58 vs 55 years, $p=0.01$) and be HIV/HCV co-infected PWID (versus HCV mono-infected PWID) (OR 3.1, 95% CI 1.6-6.2). PWID reported a median of four NMs (IQR 2-5) most of whom were kin (median 2, IQR 1-3). Having more HIV-infected NMs and discussing HIV care with the index PWID was associated with HCV treatment initiation by the index PWID (OR 3.0, 95% CI 1.5-5.9). After adjusting for age and HIV status, having more NMs who discussed their HIV care remained significantly associated with HCV treatment uptake (OR 2.6, 95% CI 1.1-6.0).

Conclusion: HCV treatment uptake appeared to be influenced by positive interactions with HIV-infected NMs in care. Interventions to improve HIV engagement and support sharing of HIV-related health information with HIV-infected and uninfected peers may improve HCV treatment uptake among peers.