

## PEER COUNSELING ON HCV AND HBV IN DARKNET: CASE FROM SAINT PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

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### **Background:**

In Russia, Darknet has become one of the main sources of not only selling and purchasing narcotic drugs but of interactions between people who use drugs as well. The largest Darknet marketplace in the EECA region, Hydra, has a forum divided into different health-related sections, i.e. The Health Corner, First Aid, Recommendations on How to Use Drugs, etc. Thus, it presents an opportunity for community-based organizations providing harm reduction services to engage with people who use drugs "where they are" (web outreach) in order to consult them on different health-related topics including HBV and HCV prevention and treatment. This presentation describes an example of such activities carried out by the Saint Petersburg Charitable Fund "Humanitarian Action" – the oldest and largest harm reduction program in Russia – in 2019-2021.

### **Description of model of care/intervention:**

In order to be able to make threads and post messages on the Hydra forum without the need to purchase narcotic drugs or other commodities beforehand, the deputy director of the Fund contacted the administrators of the forum directly. Having received their permission, he launched a thread on the forum dedicated to HBV and HCV treatment and prevention.

The thread includes information on the routes of transmission of HBV and HCV, on the signs and symptoms of these diseases, on how to protect oneself and the loved ones, on the available treatments. Information is presented clearly and concisely, without complicated medical terms and definitions, and references people who use drugs specifically.

The forum provides for comments. The participants of the forum can ask questions and receive answers in the comments section.

### **Effectiveness:**

The thread on HBV and HCV was launched on December 7, 2019. As of 23.04.2021, there were 61 comments and 15,057 views. Participants of the forum received answers for such questions as: "How does mephedrone affect the liver of a person living with HCV?", "May I use mephedrone during HCV treatment? If not mephedrone, what can be used during treatment?", "May I use amphetamines during HCV treatment?", etc.

### **Conclusion and next steps:**

The Darknet forums for people who use drugs provide an additional opportunity of web outreach activities for community-based harm reduction programs. The next steps will include the expansion of web outreach activities on the other harm reduction topics.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement: See example below:**

*The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.*

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