

Developments in access to treatment – what challenges are faced and what solutions are available?

(Claire Foreman, Phil Aubrey and Professor Graham Foster)

Notes: Rob Wolstenholme

Across two sessions, small groups of delegates from a range of professions were asked to discuss the challenges and solutions in light of recent developments in access to treatment for HCV. Below is a summary of their conclusions.

Starting with testing, the following were highlighted as interventions for improving rates among people who inject drugs: mobile testing units, hostel outreach, self-testing kits and incentives (contingency management). In prison it was felt that stigma was a major barrier that deters people from having blood-borne virus tests.

A good approach would be to “blitz” specific settings (e.g. hostels). Mobile needle and syringe programmes seem to be disappearing but they need to be maintained where possible. New populations (e.g. people involved in chemsex) are being missed.

Initial prevention of the spread of HCV and preventing re-infection were especially important to get right. It was felt that at present there were too many “breaks in the chain” from risk of infection, through infection, through to treatment and back again to re-infection. Services need dedicated, consistent staff to work through the various stages of a client’s journey. Good support can also come from peer educators.

Patient experience is hugely important. Clinic opening hours and the services they provide should be tailored to meet the lifestyle of the client.

While some people might not want treatment at a particular time they shouldn’t be lost in the system. Many people could easily be found if services spoke to each other and contacts were recorded properly.

There are systemic issues to overcome – dried blood spot testing and linking up the results with other monitoring systems could allow people to receive HCV treatments at the same time as other prescriptions, such as OST. Appointments could be held concurrently.

It is important to change the belief that all treatments are bad. Peer mentors throughout the journey are a fundamentally important factor in someone’s success with treatment – and they can reassure the client at each stage.