Campaign to Educate Scottish Physicians About Hep C Testing Had Limited Impact

High rates of undiagnosed hepatitis C pose a major impediment to combating the virus worldwide.

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A Scottish effort to educate general practitioner physicians about hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing was associated with a positive shift in their screening practices only in some scenarios.

Between 2008 and 2011, Scotland rolled out its Action Plan on Hepatitis C, which included an effort to promote general practitioners to test patients for HCV. Publishing their findings in the Journal of Viral Hepatology, the researchers surveyed Scottish general practitioners in 2007 and 2013—before and after the campaign. A respective 69 percent and 60 percent of those contacted responded to the survey in each year.

In 2007 and 2014, a respective 86 percent and 88 percent reported offering HCV testing when presented with a patient's history indicating risk for the virus; a respective 19 percent and 21 percent actively inquired about relevant risk factors; a respective 84 percent and 87 percent either always, almost always or usually offered testing to people who inject drugs; a respective 14 percent and 24 percent offered testing to those who had received medical or dental treatment in countries with a high prevalence of hep C.

In 2013, 25 percent of the survey respondents said they had received additional education about hep C. This group was more likely than those who reported not engaging in such continued education to report actively inquiring about hep C risk factors. But while those who engaged in continued hep C–related education were more likely to offer testing to those reporting medical or dental treatment in high prevalence nations than those providers who did not receive such education, there was no difference between the two groups of physicians in their reported rates offering testing in other scenarios, including: when a patient presented a hep C–related risk history; when a patient offered a medical indication for a test; when a patient requested a test; and as a part of routine screening.

"Our findings suggest that government-led awareness raising campaigns have limited impact on general practitioners' testing practices," the study authors concluded. "If the majority of the HCV-

infected population are to be diagnosed, practitioner-based or physician-centered interventions should be considered alongside educational initiatives targeted at professionals."

To read the study abstract, click here.

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