NVHR's More than Tested Cured, Project Empowers Drug Users to Take Control of Their Health

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The More than Tested, Cured project is a partnership between the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR), the Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition (AHRC), the People's Harm Reduction Alliance (PHRA) and the Urban Survivors Union (USU). These groups are working together to improve access to hepatitis C care faced by individuals who use drugs nationwide. Each organization has identified an aspect of the barriers to hepatitis C care faced by people who use drugs, and addresses these barriers at three points along the care cascade: patient education, primary care provider (PCP) referral to treatment, and specialty care provision of treatment. Addressing the stigma and misconceptions that deny access to drug users at each step in the hepatitis C care cascade requires engagement by drug users. This project involves novel ways to engage individuals in long-term, sustainable partnership with public health stakeholders including physicians and service providers. On June 15, 2017, these groups hosted a webinar discussing the project's progress. Here's a brief update at the mid-point of the project.

Urban Survivors Union

USU surveyed 67 active drug users and found that syringe exchange was vital to enable them to not reuse syringes. USU also conduced three focus group sessions with women who inject drugs, people who inject stimulants and injection drug users and held six in-depth individual interviews. In addition, they developed a short HCV prevention presentation. USU will share initial findings from focus groups and interviews later this year.

People's Harm Reduction Alliance

PHRA interviewed 15 needle exchange participants about experiences with healthcare in spring of 2017 and conducted interviews with two doctors. Among the six participants with known hepatitis C, only one reported receiving hepatitis C treatment. PHRA is providing case management and advocate support for drug users seeking hepatitis C treatment. PHRA worked with University of Washington School of Public Health graduate students to create materials (including infographics) to support participants seeking Hepatitis C care. PHRA is currently developing provider education materials to support providers working with active drug users.

Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition

The Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition contacted 25 hepatologists in Atlanta and found that one-third of the respondents did not treat active drug users for hepatitis C. AHRC is setting interview appointments with additional HCV specialists in an effort to understand current provider-level barriers to caring for active drug users. During the second half of the project, AHRC will develop a harm reduction educational training program, and provide recommendations and training to healthcare providers with a goal of improving access to providers willing to treat active drug users for HCV.

Dr. Mojgan Zare of AHRC said, “This project will allow our HCV positive patients who have not been able to receive proper care due to stigma, financial issues, or other barriers to care, receive a cure for HCV. This project will provide our patients with a new chance to live.”

Interested in the full webinar? Click here for the recording.

The More than Tested, Cured project team will be presenting a workshop at the International Symposium on Hepatitis Care in Substance Users (INHSU) in September and holding another project update webinar in November.

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