

EMCDDA HARM REDUCTION INITIATIVE INCREASING ACCESS TO HCV CARE THROUGH DRUG SERVICES



Argyro Andaraki, Ioanna Siamou, Manina Terzidou, Effie Vlassopoulou

Introduction

High prevalence of hepatitis C among PWID

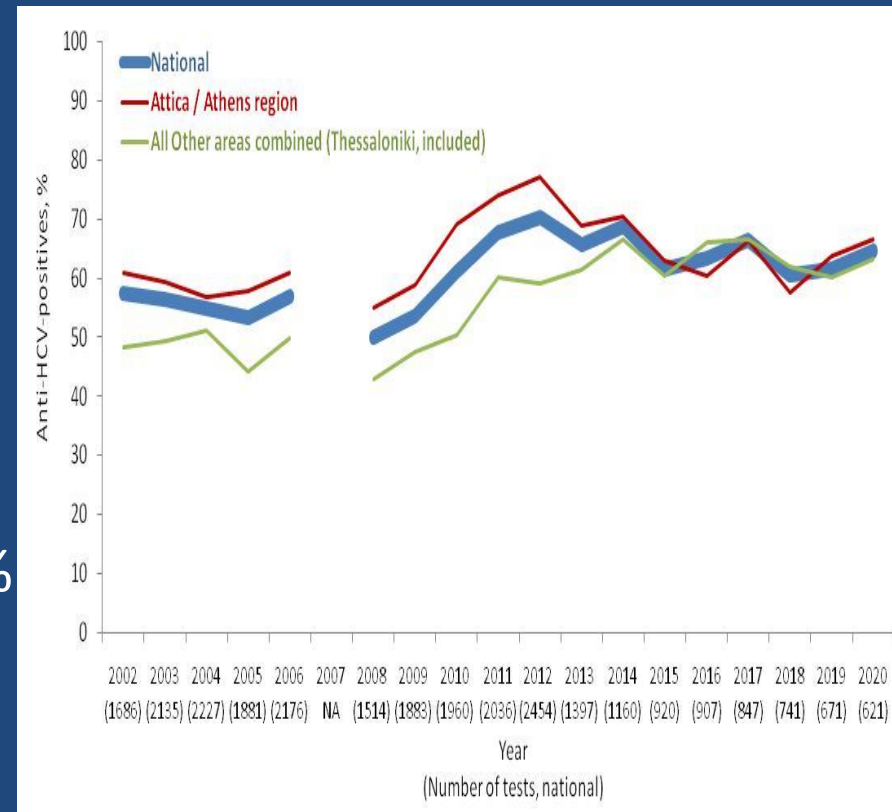
2019-2020: Overall anti-HCV prevalence among PWID tested upon entry in drug-related treatment in Greece: **61.5% - 64.6%**

Treatment modality 2019-2020

- Drug-free: 58.0% - 61.0%
- mostly OST: 67.0% - 70.5%

Geographical area 2019-2020

- Thessaloniki: 58.1% - 58.6%
- Attica/Athens region: 63.8% - 66.5%



2002-2020; Source: Greek REITOX Focal Point

Methods (1)

- In February 2020, translation & adaptation into the Greek language of the questions to be used in the study
- Recipients/participants of the study were identified by the working group & classified into 3 groups:
 - a) Policy Makers (System Level)
 - b) Health Professionals (Provider Level)
 - c) Beneficiaries & Non-Governmental Organizations – NGOs (Client Level)
- Letters were prepared briefing the groups on the purpose of the programme
- Creation of 3 questionnaires, one for each group of recipients, sent for electronic completion, receiving final delivery dates within the month of March 2020

| Questionnaires sent | Questionnaires completed |
|---------------------------|---|
| Policy Makers (10) | Quality checks performed and data processed in total from 78 received questionnaires |
| Health Professionals (91) | |
| Beneficiaries & NGOs (12) | |

Institutions and agencies of the Participants

1. Ministry of Health
2. National Health Service (EOPYY)
3. National Public Health Organization (NPHO)
4. National Coordinator for Drugs-Ministry of Health
5. Organization Against Drugs (OKANA)
6. Municipality of Athens - Prevention Center “Athena Health” & Homeless Hostel
7. Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals (KETHEA)
8. Detoxification Unit 18 ANO – Psychiatric Hospital of Attica
9. IANOS Rehabilitation Unit for Individuals Addicted to Toxic Substances (Thessaloniki Psychiatric Hospital)
10. ARGO Alternative Therapeutic Programme (Thessaloniki Psychiatric Hospital)
11. Medical personnel (psychiatrists, pathologists), Psychologists, Social Workers, Therapists, Nurses
12. Indicative number of beneficiaries from Substitution Treatment Units - OKANA
13. “PROMETHEUS” Hellenic Liver Patients Association
14. Association of HIV positive people in Greece “POSITIVE VOICE”
15. Independent Civil Society Organization «PRAKSIS»
16. Peer- to-Peer Network of Psychoactive Substances

Methods (2)

- The statistical process and analysis of the answers were completed in autumn of 2020
- 3 documents were created, based on the replies corresponding to each group and these were sent to the recipients who had replied
- These respondents were invited to two online meetings one for the group of professionals and a second one for the group of beneficiaries and NGOs
- The group of policy makers wasn't invited to a meeting, because a) few had answered and b) their answers to the corresponding questionnaire were clear and illustrated very well the existing situation legislation and the state's response to the problem of diagnostic control and treatment of hepatitis C

Methods (3)

- At the meetings with the 2 remaining groups, the discussion focused on the **basic obstacles** and **probable solutions** concerning the control and the treatment of hepatitis C in Greece and the purpose was to reach an agreement
- The minutes of each meeting were drafted and sent to the participants for proofreading. Representatives from every group (4 persons chosen by each group at the end of the meeting), took part in a final meeting, in order to conclude for:
 - the main obstacles
 - the most appropriate/feasible measures to be taken in order to increase users' accessibility in diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C in Greece.

Methods (4)

- The Greek Reitox Focal Point drew up a final text with the methodology, the conclusions and suggestions of the groups for filling the identified gaps and needs, in order to reach the goal of **Hepatitis C Elimination in Greece by 2030**.
- The final text has been checked for correctness from the working group representatives (April 2021).

It is noted that calendar reference of the actions was placed so that the realization flow can be perceived but also the difficulty in implementing the programme due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The effort of the staff of the Greek Reitox Focal Point and the active participation, help and cooperation of all participants led to the successful completion of the programme!



Final Conclusions (1)

STRENGTHS

Mandatory declaration of blood borne diseases (HIV, HCV, HBV, HAV) for PWUD admitted for treatment

Some medical examinations (e.g. serological test for HCV) are covered through the health services of drug treatment agencies/public general hospitals

Any treatment intervention for HCV is free, including DAA treatment

High level of knowledge and motivation of health care professionals (physicians, nurses, etc.) in drug services regarding HCV prevention and treatment

Active and sustainable NGOs ,mainly regarding HCV prevention (provision of rapid tests on HIV & HCV and fibro scan tests)



Final Conclusions (2)

WEAKNESSES

Gaps in the coverage of some diagnostic tests by the National Health System (e.g. PCR test for all anti-HCV positive patients)

Diagnostic test and treatment in remote regions of the country are not performed in drug treatment units/prisons if there is no medical staff in the programme/prison

Education / training on Hepatitis C for the staff of drug treatment services is performed occasionally

No planning for One stop shops, so as that screening and treatment on HCV to be offered in areas near the drug treatment facilities

The National Coordinating Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Hepatitis C has been inactive since 2019



Final Conclusions (3)

OPPORTUNITIES

National Strategy and National Action Plan for Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 2021-26 (under approval). Special mention for hepatitis C elimination actions.

Prioritization of hepatitis on the political agenda. Transfer of the experience of coordination and cooperation gained from the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Final Conclusions (4)

THREATS

Coronavirus pandemic and the potential risk of a return to fiscal austerity

Homelessness and comorbidity are the most likely factors preventing IDUs from diagnosing and treating hepatitis C

Discrimination against PWUD by the health personnel of general hospitals

Absence of follow-up in PWUD that have had a medical examination (whether positive or not) can create a distorted picture of the prevalence and impact of the disease on the user population

The percentage of undiagnosed PWUD for infectious diseases not approaching the drug treatment system



Suggestions & Proposals (1)

4. Expansion of the use of rapid tests and dried blood spot tests in drug treatment facilities

1. To prepare a manual for the treatment of each blood borne disease for the staff of the drug treatment agencies

3. To investigate the feasibility and cost-effectiveness ratio for creating one stop shops

2. To institutionalize the operation of mobile units of health professionals for diagnostic testing from the drug treatment units of large urban centers (cities) to regional areas (towns). Making further use of tele-medicine.

Suggestions & Proposals (2)

8. Improving the coordination for the monitoring of cases between the drug treatment agencies and EODY (National Public Health Organization-primary health system). Although epidemiological surveillance is mandatory, in practice it is observed only in patients admitted for treatment - It is also foreseen in the National Action Plan for drugs.

5. Training of the staff of drug treatment agencies

7. Immediate re-convening of the National Coordinating Committee for Monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Hepatitis C

6. Training / raising awareness of general hospital health staff in order to reduce racist behaviour towards PWUD



obrigado

Dank U

Merci

mahalo

Köszí

спасибо

Grazie

Thank
you

mawuuru

Takk

Gracias

Dziękuję

Děkuju

danke

Kiitos