Myths about Treating Substance Users with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

In various settings, people with active substance use disorder(s) have been cured of HCV and have low rates of reinfection.[1,2,3] The following are common misconceptions about providing HCV treatment to people with substance use disorder(s):

Myth:
Since active substance users should not be treated for HCV, screen patients for drug and alcohol use to determine eligibility for HCV treatment.

Reality:
The purpose of screening for substance use disorders is to determine who would benefit from treatment and harm reduction support for those conditions. Results of drug and alcohol screening does not predict treatment adherence.*[4,5]

* Some states may require a period of sobriety prior to treatment for HCV. Check insurance pre-authorization requirements before prescribing.

Myth:
People cured of HCV who inject drugs are at high risk of HCV reinfection.

Reality:
Data suggest reinfection is rare in people who inject drugs who clear HCV with therapy, even if they continue to inject drugs.[6]
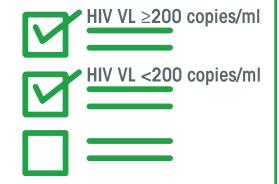
Myth:
People who use substances must have an undetectable HIV viral load before they are treated for HCV.

Reality:
HIV viral suppression is not a requirement for HCV treatment in coinfected persons.[7]

HIV VL ≥200 copies/ml

HIV VL <200 copies/ml

Myth:
Providing HCV treatment to people who use substances is not cost effective.

Reality:
Completion of HCV treatment even among a modest number of people who use substances is cost effective.[8,9]

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The AETC National Clinician Consultation Center provides free and confidential clinician-to-clinician advice to providers of all experience levels. Contact them with your HIV, hepatitis C and substance use management questions.

HIV Management · 1-800-933-3414 and Online: http://nccc.ucsf.edu
Expert advice on preventing and treating HIV Monday–Friday; 9am–8pm ET

Hepatitis C Management · 844-437-4636 or 844-(HEP-INFO)
Advice on hepatitis C mono-infection management from testing to initiating treatment to managing advanced disease. Monday–Friday; 9am-8pm ET

Substance Use Management · 1-855-300-3595
Advice on substance use management for healthcare providers. Monday–Friday; 9am-8pm ET

AETC AIDS Education & Training Center Program
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Infographic references and clinical resources related to HIV/HCV prevention, care and treatment can be found here: https://aidsetc.org/hivhcv

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