INCIDENCE OF HEPATITIS C IN AN EUROPEAN LOW THRESHOLD METHADONE PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND AND AIM

Data on incidence of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in Europe, and particularly in Portugal, are scarce. Where documented, injecting drug use is a major transmission route for HCV infections.

We aimed to estimate the incidence of HCV infection in an ambulatory low-threshold methadone program and related medical and psychosocial support, in Lisbon, Portugal (LTMP-Lx).

POPULATION AND METHODS

LTMP-LX an ambulatory low-threshold methadone program through mobile units in Lisbon, Portugal, directed to heroin addicts, with or without polydrug use, most of them psychologically disturbed and often with high-risk behaviors. It began on 2001, and is currently attended by about 1200 individuals every day.

At LTMP-Lx, serological status for HCV and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), as well as drug use and other risk behaviours, are collected prospectively from every individual in the cohort.

Negative serologies are repeated annually during follow-up.

We analyzed serologies from individuals entering the program between 2001 and 2013, and estimated the incidence of HCV seroconversion in the whole cohort and its subgroups.

Statistical analysis was performed with Microsoft Office® Excel 2007 and STATA® 12.1.

RESULTS

1032 individuals had a baseline negative HCV serology and at least one further serology:
- 77.6% (n=801) males;
- median age at program entry 35 [18;63] years;
- 16.8% (n=173) with ever injecting drug use;
- 8.2% (n=85) with a positive HIV baseline serology;
Among these, 91 (8.8%) seroconverted for HCV during 3852.5 person-years.

**SEROCONVERSION INCIDENCE (WHOLE COHORT): 2.36/100 PERSON-YEARS (IC95% 1.92-2.90/100 PY)**

Incidence of HCV seroconversion in subgroups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Individuals [N]</th>
<th>Seroconversions [n]</th>
<th>Observation period [PY]</th>
<th>Incidence [1/100 PY]</th>
<th>Incidence IC 95% [1/100 PY]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>♀</td>
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<td>3316.5</td>
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<td>0.53-1.15</td>
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</table>

*Statistically significant difference in incidence (p<0.05).
* Status from one individual was not known.

CONCLUSIONS

At this European low threshold methadone administration program, HCV seroconversion incidence was low in non-injecting drug users.

It was significantly higher among injecting drug users and HIV positive individuals.