

## **NHS England and NHS Improvement *Training video for Hepatitis C antibody testing in community pharmacy script***

Hello, I'm Professor Graham Foster, and I'm the Clinical Lead for the Hepatitis C Elimination Programme for NHS England, and NHS Improvement. Today we're going to talk to you about the Community Pharmacy Testing Programme. We're going to start by telling you a little bit about Hepatitis C, what it does, and how we can look after people infected. We're going to tell you a little bit about the Community Pharmacy Testing Scheme, we're going to tell you about the information, the individual needs before testing. We're then going to show you how to do the test, and we will give you a demonstration of the test. We're going to tell you the information you should give to the individual after they've been tested. We are not going to talk about some of the logistical issues, about the contracting issues, about the registration issues, and about some of the bureaucratic necessities of the programme. They will be covered in the National Service Specification.

### **What is Hepatitis C and who is at risk?**

Hepatitis C is a virus that's transmitted by blood to blood contact. In order to transmit Hepatitis C, you need quite a large amount of blood transfer. So infection is very common in people who have received contaminated blood, or contaminated blood products, or received medical care with contaminated equipment and this most often happens to people born outside the UK. Now for people infected in this way, NHS England has a very wide-reaching scheme of testing and treatment in the Primary Care Network. So these individuals are not the focus of the pharmacy programme. The other major risk factor for Hepatitis C is injecting drug use, and we know that very large numbers of people who inject drugs, either now or in the past, have been infected with Hepatitis C. For many of these people they are not in contact with general services. They may or may not have a General Practitioner, they may very rarely access normal medical services. The only point of contact for such patients may be in community pharmacies, and that's where you come in, and that's where you can help us to eliminate Hepatitis C.

When you contract Hepatitis C, the virus goes into your liver, and it sits there for many, many years. Very few people come into contact with the virus and then clear the virus themselves, but the majority become chronically infected. Most people are infected with Hepatitis C through drug use in their teenage years, or early 20s, and after 20-30 years of chronic infection, the liver becomes very badly scarred and eventually cirrhosis develops. That is extreme scarring of the liver. So after 30 years, up to 30 per cent of patients will have cirrhosis. The cirrhosis will then progress, eventually the liver will fail, and the patient will die. Once you have Hepatitis C cirrhosis, you're at very high risk of developing a liver cancer, which is very hard to treat. If we take away the virus, if we cure Hepatitis C before the cirrhosis has developed, the complications of the infection do not occur. So this is an infection that slowly destroys the liver over 30 to 40 years, and if treated early it prevents liver damage.

Most of the individuals who contact you will have no obvious symptoms of Hepatitis C, because infection for many years causes no obvious signs or symptoms whatsoever. However, when we get rid of the virus, when we treat people with Hepatitis C, very often they start to feel better. They will tell us that they're thinking

more clearly, they will tell us that they're less tired. So there are lots of advantages to getting rid of Hepatitis C beyond the benefits of liver health.

### **Treating and curing hepatitis C**

I've mentioned a few times treatment for Hepatitis C. One of the massive changes in treatment for Hepatitis C occurred about three or four years ago, when we moved from injectable treatment interferon which is very unpleasant, very unpopular with lots of side effects, and we moved from this interferon to tablet only treatment. The tablets that we now use to treat Hepatitis C are virtually side effect free. In the clinical trials, the side effects of the tablet were the same as the side effects in the placebo arm.

We've now treated millions and millions of patients with these medications, they are very easy to use, they are very straightforward medications, they're taken for a few weeks, and they have a cure rate of around 95 per cent. So when you see an individual with Hepatitis C, you can be very confident that they will get access to NHS funded care, that gives them a very high chance of getting rid of the virus, and is virtually side effect free. Because this is an infectious disease, the normal restrictions on access to NHS funded care do not apply. So the NHS will supply treatment to people who do not have General Practitioners, who are not eligible for other NHS treatments. So everyone that you see in your community pharmacy, who has a risk factor for Hepatitis C, is potentially eligible for treatment. So you can reassure the people that you're testing that they will get access to this potentially lifesaving medication.

### **The hepatitis C antibody testing service in community pharmacy**

The pharmacy testing project is aimed at people who do not have other contacts with the National Health Service. So people who are receiving a methadone script, or attending addiction services, should be offered testing and treatment in those services. They are not our target for the pharmacy testing programme. So the people we are aiming the pharmacy testing project at are people who have no other contact with NHS England services. These are people who may have admitted a past history of injection drug use, people who may be actively injecting drugs, people coming to a pharmacy to collect injecting paraphernalia. We're not planning to test people in the community pharmacy who are taking methadone scripts, or people who are otherwise engaged in addiction services. Remember the people coming into your pharmacy for Hepatitis C testing may have no signs or symptoms of the infection.

### **How to approach people about the hepatitis C antibody testing in community pharmacy**

Hello my name's Archie Christian, I'm the National Training Volunteer Manager at the Hepatitis C Trust. At the Hepatitis C Trust we've been developing our approaches for working with those affected by Hepatitis C for two decades now. We found that although not one approach fits all, some key principles bring about some good results.

#### *Appeal to the human nature of the individual*

Asking the person if they'd be willing to help you to implement the service, and that they'd be bringing about not only health improvements for them, as an individual, but to their wider community, quite often can bring about good results.

### *Demonstrate you care about the person's wellbeing*

Be attentive and show that you care about them as a person. It's important to stress that you're working to their agenda, and not yours and that it's going to bring about personal benefits to them, and that you actually care.

### *Be patient and consistent*

If an individual refuses on the first offer, don't lose hope, continue to offer them, and gently remind them each time they visit. Show them that your continued care and support is important. We have countless testimonies at the Hep C Trust where that continued and gentle approach often reaps big rewards.

### *Explore their reasoning behind the refusal*

Exploring the reason behind the refusal, you may find that the individual is operating under a misconception. At this point you can give them new information, and it will help you to engage. We have found that if you use these multiple approaches with working with those affected by Hep C, or at risk of the condition, will bring about results. So implementing these different approaches into your conversations with those at risk from Hep C, has shown that we've been able to engage a great deal, a number of people underserved ordinarily in the services that exist. We want to ensure that we leave no-one behind.

### **What should you cover with the individual prior to testing?**

Once you've approached the individual and discussed the testing with them, it's important to remind them of the important features of the test, and to discuss what the test will involve. Please tell the individual that a friend, or someone from the pharmacy can accompany them if they feel more comfortable. The test will involve a small needle prick into a finger or thumb, a few drops of blood will be sucked up, and placed on the testing slide. The testing slide takes 15 minutes to develop, and the testing slide will indicate whether or not the individual has been exposed to the Hepatitis C virus, by giving the result of a Hepatitis C antibody test. It's important to inform the individual that an antibody test indicates exposure, and not necessarily infection. Some people, who are Hepatitis C antibody positive, may have already cleared the virus. It's very important that the individual who tests antibody positive goes on to have further testing to confirm infection. Please take the opportunity to reassure the individual that if they do test positive for Hepatitis C antibodies, and are found to be infected, effective treatment is readily available.

Please inform the individual before taking the test, that information about them may be recorded on the Hepatitis C Testing Registry, and if the test is positive, their details will be passed on to one of the operational delivery networks, who will arrange further testing and, if necessary, onward treatment. Please take the opportunity to reassure the individual that treatment will be available, it is side effect free and highly effective. Please remember to tell the individual that if they decline to enter their details on to the Hepatitis C Testing Registry, they're still eligible for testing. Please remember to check with the individual that they are comfortable with you passing on their information to their General Practitioner. Again, if they do not wish their General Practitioner to be informed, they're still eligible for testing.

It's important to tell the individual that a positive test may have implications for life insurance, and mortgage purposes. Patient identifiable data will be held at the pharmacy, as part of the audit and validation process, but the data will be

anonymised, and the individual's details will not be available to anyone outside the pharmacy.

We anticipate that most individuals who are tested will be happy with their data being recorded on the Hepatitis C Testing Registry. For those individuals who decline to have their named data entered onto the testing registry, please reassure them that anonymised data will be retained in the pharmacy, but their named patient data will not be available to others. The anonymised data will be used for audit purposes. It's important to advise the individual that if the test is positive, they would recommend to their partners, and those that they have shared injecting equipment about their Hepatitis C status, and they should advise their partners and friends to come and be tested for Hepatitis C.

For those individuals who test positive, it is important to advise them to inform those people they've shared injecting paraphernalia with, to come and get tested in the community pharmacy, as there is a high risk of onward transmission to those people with whom they've shared needles, and other injecting paraphernalia.

### **How to test for hepatitis C antibodies**

My name is Josephine Schulz, and I'm the lead nurse for hepatology at Barts Health. Today I am demonstrating the Hepatitis C point-of-care test, this is a Hepatitis C antibody test. If the antibody test is positive, it will require referral for a confirmatory blood test, and possible referral to specialised services, following normal referral pathways, for treatment assessment. This is an example of the Hepatitis C testing kit. Within the testing kit, there is a lancet for pricking the finger, there is a pipette, dilutant, an alcohol swab for cleaning the finger, and a test cassette. The test cassette has a results window, and it also has a dilutant port and a sample port. You will also need to bring some gauze, and some gloves, and you will also need to dispose your lancet appropriately and safely, using a sharps box in order to maintain the safety of yourself and your colleagues.

Before carrying out the test, have a look at the individual's hands, and select a finger. It is best to select a finger that does not have tough skin. If the individual's finger is cold, then run it under hot water to encourage blood flow. The risk of transmission to you is very, very low indeed. However, if you feel more comfortable, then you are able to use two pairs of gloves. In the unlikely event of a needle stick injury, remove your gloves, and encourage the blood to flow from the affected area. Clean the area, and then apply a clean plaster. If there are any concerns about onward transmission, then see your GP for follow up testing, and onward referral.

After putting on your gloves, clean the finger using a gauze swab, allow the finger to air dry, or wipe the finger using a piece of gauze. Press the lancet to the finger and wait for a click. Squeeze the finger to encourage a blood drop, and then suck the blood drop, using a pipette, and transfer to the sample port. Do not release the bulb of the pipette, as this will force the blood up into the bulb. Place a piece of gauze over the affected area.

Place two drops of dilutant into the dilutant port, and then it is simply a case of waiting for 15 minutes, to ascertain the result of the test. This test is antibody negative as it has one line, the control line, visible in the testing window. If the test

has two lines, then that means that it is a positive antibody test. If no line is visible in the window, then that means that the test is invalid, and needs to be redone. All pieces of equipment that have come into contact with blood, need to be disposed of safely and appropriately, with the lancet being placed into a sharps box.

### **How to follow up with the patient after the antibody test has been completed**

Hello, my name's Suman Verma, I'm one of the liver consultants at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital. I have been running some pilot studies in community pharmacies in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester, looking at identifying patients with Hepatitis C, in those patients who inject drugs, but do not engage with any other clinical services. The results of these pilots have shown that four in ten people, who actively inject drugs, but are not engaging with any other clinical services, have Hepatitis C. This therefore provides an opportunity for you to provide a new service within your pharmacy to these individuals, to enable them to have their Hepatitis C tested and treated, as well as helping them on the pathway to turning their life around.

In the 15 minutes that it takes to get the point-of-care test result, this is an opportunity to discuss with the patient what the results mean and, if appropriate, what the next steps will be. If the test result is negative, please advise the patient that they should be tested again in six months' time. If the test result is positive, reassure the patient that despite the test being positive for Hepatitis C antibodies, there are good treatments, which are all oral medications, and have high cure rates, and that you can refer them to an appropriate centre for them to receive this.

If you have a patient who reacts badly to the news that they have Hepatitis C positive antibodies in their blood, please contact your local operating delivery network lead, who can then arrange an urgent appointment to review the patient and this can usually be done within the same day.

This time can also be utilised to talk to the patient about other issues, such as strategies to work towards a healthy lifestyle, and also to reiterate the ongoing messages about safe injecting practices.

Once conversations with regards to the test results have been concluded, please enter the patient's details into the Hepatitis C Testing Register, but only if the patient has given their consent for you to do so. As discussed in the pre-test discussion section, consent for patient's data to be recorded this way should have been included and gained. Also when discussing with the patient their details for inclusion in the Hepatitis C Testing Registry, please ask them their birth name, rather than registering them under a nickname, so that we can identify them on the NHS register. If they decline to provide their real name, or decline to have their details included in the Hepatitis C Testing Register, they are still eligible to receive testing and treatment for Hepatitis C.

Thank you for listening. For further information, please go to the NHSE website and enter Hepatitis C into the search box, or you could go to the Hepatitis C Trust website. For questions on local procedures, please contact your local Hepatitis C network.