

## Public Health Campaign to Eradicate Hepatitis C Virus during the Covid-19 Emergency in the North-East of Italy

**Authors :** Emanuela Zilli, Antonio Madia, Milvia Marchiori, Paola Anello, Chiara Cabbia, Emanuela Velo, Delia Campagnolo, Michele Scmazzon, Emanuela Salvatico, S. Tikvina, Antonio Miotti

**Abstract :** Hepatitis C is an inflammation of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Antiviral medicines can cure more than 95% of cases of hepatitis C infection, but access to diagnosis and treatment remains low. The ULSS 6 Euganea - Health Trust has implemented a campaign to eradicate hepatitis C in the province of Padua (North-East of Italy), which can be subdivided into three areas: North (300.000 inhabitants), Centre (400.000) and South (300.000). In September 2021, the project was launched in the Northern area; a set of brochures was distributed in outpatient services, general practitioners' clinics and offices, community pharmacy services, social health districts, and through social networks. The Hepatology Service contacted 460 patients selected by the Clinical Laboratory (positivity for HCV antibodies): 83 patients (18.0%) had been already cured of HCV infection, missing or deceased; 377 patients (82.0%) met the criteria to be eligible for HCV eradication therapy and were therefore included in a Day Service specific agenda and followed by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, with a dedicated telephone line. Haemato-chemical tests, general medical check-ups and ultrasound tests with fibroscan were performed. Patients were tested for Sars-CoV-2 positivity; those not yet vaccinated against Covid-19 were encouraged to complete the vaccination scheme. All 377 patients (100%) received HCV eradication therapy at the community pharmacy service; a detailed explanation of how to take their medication was provided. At the end of the first phase, Covid-19 vaccination rate was 100% (377/377), including patients already vaccinated and new-vaccinated. Check-up appointments were arranged after 2 or 3 months, according to the treatment plan. The awareness campaign and the organization of HCV eradication therapy service by ULSS 6 Euganea are proving to be effective; the project is now going to be applied to Central and Southern areas of the province (1.132 patients).

**Keywords :** public health, HCV-eradication, Covid-19 emergency, health communication strategies

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