

How to Talk to Your Patients About Hepatitis C

Overview

This tool is based on the principles of motivational interviewing—a conversational approach that strengthens a person's motivation and commitment to positive change. Studies have shown that for patients at risk for HCV—most notably people who inject drugs (PWID)—brief motivational interviewing interventions improve knowledge about HCV and attitudes toward HCV testing and treatment. To apply motivational interviewing in your daily practice, follow these strategies:¹⁻⁶

In HCV care, "one size does not fit all". Therefore, the sample conversation starters and practical tips listed in this tool should be adapted according to the setting and patient's preferences, culture, sexual orientation and sexual practices, language, and health literacy.

- Express empathy through reflective listening
- Elicit discrepancies between the patient's goals and values and his/her current behaviour
- Avoid arguments and direct opposition to the patient's views and beliefs
- Adapt to the patient's resistance to change rather than opposing it directly
- Support self-efficacy, self-care, self-respect, optimism, and empowerment

HCV Risk Factors and Exposures

Sample Conversation Guide7-11 Introduce vourself Hello, my name is...Today, I will be asking you some questions to help us get to know each other and see in what ways I can help you. and explain your role **Emphasise** Please remember that everything we talk about today is confidential and will not leave this room. confidentiality "Normalise" your The questions I will be asking you today are things I discuss every day with all my patients. questions **Emphasise that** I need to get accurate information from you so that I can provide the best possible care and this information is advice to you for your health. essential for your job Let the patient know that you will try to elicit Is there a time in your life when you may have been exposed to HCV? responses regarding Are you comfortable to talk about it? past HCV exposure(s)/ risk factors **Elicit information about** What substances do you use? How often do you use them? past and/or current substance use Do you inject or sniff? Do you inject yourself, or does someone else inject you? Do you know the people you inject with? Do you know if any of them have HCV or other infections? Do you share needles, syringes or other injecting equipment? How do you stay HCV-negative? What do you do to prevent HCV from spreading to others? **Elicit information** I ask all of my patients at least once a year about their sexual health...How is your sex life? about sexual practices and/ Do you have sex with men, women, or both? What kinds of sex are you having? Oral? Anal? or offer referral Vaginal? Do you "top", "bottom", or both? to gay-friendly organizations Have you ever used drugs while having sex? How often do you use condoms? How/where do or services you meet partners? Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) affect us all... Have you ever had an STI? Which one(s)? Have you ever noticed any bleeding during or after sex? Do you know if your sexual partner(s) has HCV or other infections? If you find it hard to talk to me or the staff here, we can direct you to other places, where you

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Throughout the conversation, recognise and validate the patient's expertise in his/her own life experiences.



Do not assume that all people involved in high-risk behaviours, including injecting drug use, are irresponsible and or do not protect themselves or others from HCV and other infections.

can meet people with similar experiences...



Encourage men who have sex with men to talk about their sex practices and to get tested for HIV, HCV, and other STIs. If the patient does not feel comfortable opening up to you/your team, you can refer them to specific gay-friendly services.



HCV Screening

Sample Conversation Guide ⁸		
Introduce yourself and explain your role	Hello, my name isToday, I will work with you to help you understand what HCV is and how getting tested for HCV can be helpful to you.	
Elicit the patient's interest in testing	What do you think about HCV testing? Are you open to getting tested today? Are you worried about getting tested? What worries you? I understand that receiving a positive HCV test can be intimidating	
Provide education and feedback	What do you know about HCV? Do you understand the importance of getting an HCV test?	
Address patient questions or concerns	Feel free to stop me and ask questions if something I say is not clear to you. Do you have questions about anything that we just discussed?	
Convey a positive message when delivering test results	I am glad you got this test. This was an important first step in the right direction. The next step is another test to check if there is any active virus inside your body at the moment. Remember that, even if this test is positive, you can still remain healthy.	

Test Results and Linkage to Care

Sample Conversation Guide ⁸		
When giving a <u>negative</u> HCV test result	Discuss the "window" period and arrange re-testing, if necessary Counsel about risk behaviour Reinforce harm reduction	
When giving a positive HCV test result	Ensure that the patient has a good understanding of what the test results mean Personalise the discussion to the individual patient • Let's talk about what having HCV means for your day-to-day life and activities	
	Reassure the patient and provide hope • If you have any concerns about your HCV status, let's talk about it now. We can make sure you and everyone around you is safe and comfortable.	
	Piscuss referrals/linkage to HCV care You can see a doctor as soon as possible and find out if you have liver damage. We can help you get an appointment with a specialist in your area. For HCPs who are able to prescribe HCV therapies after a positive HCV test, it is important to emphasize that they can help the patient with treatment: You can also find out about HCV treatment. I can help to provide you with the treatment.	



If the patient is reluctant to talk about HCV test results or diagnosis, consider providing him/her with educational materials to take home. Include a simple message about the meaning of the test results and next steps, such as appropriate referral to a specialist.



Linkage to Care: Tips for Your Clinic



- Keep a list of relevant organisations
 - Include phone, address, hours of operation, list of offered services
- Seek and share referral resources with your colleagues
- Partner with local community-based organisations, coalitions, networks, or advocacy groups that provide HCV services
- Provide referrals to:
 - An experienced HCV provider
 - Peer navigators
 - Support groups



If your clinic/organization provides access to HCV therapies, discuss this option right away with newly diagnosed patients. Counsel patients on the benefits of starting treatment as early as possible in the course of chronic HCV infection.

HCV Treatment and Adherence

Sample Conversation Guide^{1,6,12,14}

Explain the benefits of HCV cure

Explain the short-term benefits of HCV treatment:

- · You may feel better immediately after you start the treatment.
- Some people report feeling happier and more positive after they get cured.

Explain the long-term benefits of HCV cure:

 Curing HCV before you start to feel really sick may prevent serious liver damage and liver cancer.

Educate patients about the new HCV therapies

Elicit and explore your patients' understanding and expectations of HCV treatment:

- · What do you know about HCV medications?
- Do you know anyone who has been treated with the new medications?
- What do you expect the treatment to be like?

Educate patients about the advantages of the newer HCV treatments (direct-acting antivirals, or DAAs) relative to previously used interferon-based regimens:

- There are new medications for HCV that can cure you in 2-3 months. 9 out 10
 people who take these medications are cured of HCV and can live normal lives.
- The new medications have very few side effects: the most common ones are headache and tiredness. But they are usually not severe, and you can take paracetamol for the pain.
- The new medicines are pills and do not require injections like the older interferon therapies that you may have heard about.

HCV Treatment and Adherence (cont'd):

Sample Conversation Guide^{1,6,12,14}

Assess treatment readiness

Emphasise that treatment is a personal choice:

• It's up to you what to do about this. No one can decide for you-only you can.

Find out details about the patient's personal life:

- Do you think you can commit to this treatment right now?
- Are you working? Are you planning to start a new job/school at this time?
- Is there any big change that you expect in your life in the next few months?

 Do you plan to move somewhere or go away somewhere any time soon?

Help patients feel supported

Do you have people to care for you and support you when you start treatment?

Do your friends or family have any questions about the treatment?

Identify and manage adherence issues

Recognize possible barriers to treatment adherence

• I understand that it is difficult to focus on this entirely when you have so much going on right now in your life...

Discuss incidences of non-compliant behaviour in a non-judgmental manner:

• What do you think is getting in your way of keeping up with the treatment and with your doctor's appointments?

Acknowledge the feelings experienced by the patient through affirming statements:

• I hear you. I understand. I can see what you are going through...

Express your personal concern and interest in this HCP-patient relationship



Explain to patients that the new HCV therapies are safe and effective for people who are actively injecting drugs.

Engaging PWID in HCV Treatment: Tips for Your Clinic¹³



- Simplify the treatment work-up (e.g., utilise mobile transient elastography and noninvasive serum biomarker tests for liver assessment)
- Apply a shorter treatment course
- Integrate HCV treatment within substance use disorder care
- Provide psychosocial support before, during, and after HCV treatment

- Implement mobile outreach programs
- Implement pop-up and short-term services in regions with high HCV prevalence
- Provide peer support/navigation
- Provide counselling
- · Utilise case management



HCV Reinfection

Sample Conversation Guide

Provide information about reinfection

Explain what reinfection is:

- People who have cleared HCV are not immune to it and can get reinfected
- You can get HCV more than once
- · You can get reinfected during or after treatment

Provide education on what patients should do to protect themselves from reinfection

Reinforce harm reduction

Offer follow-up support

Link patients who are reinfected to treatment

How to Communicate with Specific Patient Groups

Motivational interviewing interventions applied in a culturally sensitive manner can help patients disclose their disease status and engage in screening and treatment, especially within patient groups that are stigmatised or distrustful of traditional medicine, including **migrants** or **people experiencing incarceration**.^{6,15} The type of language used by HCPs during clinical encounters or counselling can have a significant impact on the patient's attitude towards his/her health, well-being, and desire to receive health information and care.¹⁵ The tips below, when combined with the appropriate linguistic support, can help establish a welcoming, stigma-free, and trustworthy environment and can facilitate engagement of **migrant patients** and **patients experiencing incarceration** in HCV care.

Engaging migrants in HCV Care: Tips for Your Clinic^{1,6}



- Express empathy: demonstrate that you are not just a counsellor/clinician, but a genuine person who has the same feelings as everyone else, including your patients
- Provide some personal information—sometimes, patients need to know more information about the "helper"/"healer" in order to develop trust
- Try to develop a deeper bond/friendship with the patient—some migrants may seek a spiritual bond in order to truly trust in a therapeutic alliance
- Link family, community, and cultural values to a desire for positive behavioural change
- Use indirect expressions, including metaphors, legends, and/ or stories to engage the patient's attention
- Use language that the patient can understand or relate to

Engaging people who are incarcerated in HCV care: Tips for Your Clinic¹⁵

Using stigma-free, "patient-centred" language when talking with people who are incarcerated is essential for reducing discrimination and improving their access to HCV care services. A recent publication by Tran et al. provides specific examples of humanizing language for people who experience incarceration.¹⁵

General tips include:

- Use specific terms to adapt to the patient's language and culture
- Use "person-centred" language rather than medical conditioncentred language
- Convince patients that they are not powerless, and can continue to live with dignity despite their environment or condition
- Cultivate self-awareness
- Use humane and constructive language that promotes dignity, respect, and positive outlook



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