

Hepatitis C Psychological Support Study Information

The School of Psychology (University of Adelaide) and the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology (Royal Adelaide Hospital) have commenced a research study exploring the desire for psychological support in people living with chronic hepatitis C. The psychological burden of chronic hepatitis C is considerable and particularly evident in high rates of depression and anxiety in those suffering from this disease. This psychiatric morbidity diminishes quality of life, aggravates perceived physical symptomatology, and reduces rates of antiviral treatment commencement, adherence, and clearance. The literature surrounding the treatment of this psychiatric co-morbidity has focussed on pharmacological treatments. While pharmacotherapy has proven to be effective, there are a number of disadvantages such as variable efficacy in patients with liver damage, as well as physical and psychological side-effects. Certain psychotherapeutic approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy have demonstrated clear efficacy in population groups similar to those living with chronic hepatitis C. Furthermore, evidence has shown that combining pharmacological and psychological treatment is more effective than either alone.

Thus, psychotherapy may be a useful adjunct or alternative treatment for psychiatric disorders in chronic hepatitis C patients. In order to assess this possibility, two criteria must be met. Firstly, psychotherapy must be shown to be acceptable or desired by a significant proportion of patients. Secondly, psychotherapy must be shown to be effective in a significant proportion of patients. In order to assess the first claim, a brief questionnaire has been developed and sent to a large sample of chronic hepatitis C outpatients from the Royal Adelaide Hospital liver clinic. We are now aiming to expand this survey online to reach a broader range of potential participants. This will reduce the sampling bias in our research sample, and increase the validity, reliability, and generalisability of our results.

The survey takes 10 to 20 minutes to complete, and includes sections on demographic information, desire for psychological support, history of psychological support, disease and treatment characteristics, psychological symptomatology, and access to social support. This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Royal Adelaide Hospital. The survey can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/hepcsupport>. In order to reach as many potential respondents as possible, we are hoping to advertise this survey through hepatitis C organisations across Australia. We would greatly appreciate if you would consider advertising this survey through your website, newsletters, mailing lists, and any other appropriate channels you use to communicate with people living with hepatitis C. If you are able to advertise this research study, or if you have any queries regarding this study, please contact me via phone on (08) 8313 3136 or via e-mail at benjamin.j.stewart@adelaide.edu.au.

Sincerely,

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