The Challenge of Hepatitis C in Central and South Eastern Europe:
Who is at risk and how can patients gain access to effective screening, diagnosis and treatment?

BULGARIA

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HCV infection in Bulgaria - epidemiology

- 1.28% HCV seroprevalence – 2000, multicenter study
- 87% HCV viremic rate – 92 000 viremic cases
- No gender differences
- HCV genotypes – 62% GT1b, 20% GT1a, 14% GT3
- HCV incidence – 1.18 per 100 000 persons / 85 cases in 2015
- Main roads of transmission – IVDUs and nosocomial transmission
- HCV chronic infection - 1200 pts diagnosed/annually

Petrunov B et al, Journal of Hepatology, V 36, Suppl 1, April 2002, 138-139
HCV infection in Bulgaria – screening and testing

• No national policy for HCV screening

• Routine testing for HCV in at risk populations is performed all over in the country
  o Patients on hemodialysis – entering or on long-term dialysis
  o Patients with an organ transplant or in the waiting list for transplantation
  o PWID – current or ever injected
  o HIV positive individuals
  o Those who received blood or blood-derived product before 1992
  o Children born to HCV-infected mother
  o Medical personnel after recognized exposure
HCV infection in Bulgaria – testing and diagnosis

- Anti HCV Ab tests
- HCV viral load testing and genotyping
  - reimbursed by NHIF in Gastroenterology Clinics with III level of competence (clinical pathway 73)
  - Private medical laboratories
- 15 Gastroenterology Clinics accredited by NHIF to prescribe HCV antiviral treatment
HCV infection in Bulgaria – treatment options

Reimbursement policy for HCV antiviral treatment of NHIF is based on National Consensus for the Treatment of Viral hepatitis C, created and annually updated by the National Association of Gastroenterology since 1999

Reimbursed by NHIF currently:

- **Sofosbuvir/ Ledipasvir** - since 01 March 2016
- **Ombitasvir/ Paritaprevir/Dazabivir** – since 01 March 2016
- **Grazoprevir/ Elbasvir** – since 01 January 2017
HCV infection in Bulgaria – treatment covered by NHIF

2016 – F3, F4, others regardless of fibrosis level: nonresponders; relapsers; HCV extrahepatic manifestations transplanted pts, hemodialysis, renal HCV-related disease, women who wish to become pregnant,
HCV infection in Bulgaria – treatment options

Since 01 March 2017:

All HCV – positive patients, treatment naïve and treatment-experienced patients with compensated or decompensated chronic liver disease, could be considered for antiviral therapy. DAAs are the only treatment option.

HCV infection in Bulgaria – treatment contraindications

- **No absolute contraindications**
- **Relative contraindications**
  - Limited life expectancy due to non-liver-related comorbidities
  - Severity of liver disease and concomitant diseases in selecting DAA regime
  - Low adherence to therapy – active drug use; heavy alcohol drinking – “these dependences should be addressed first and then antiviral therapy considered”

HCV infection in Bulgaria – problems to be solved

- National epidemiological survey on HCV infection in Bulgaria is required
- Increase HCV testing rate among general population and among at risk populations
- Increase linkage to care and diagnosis rates
- Increase number of treated patients
Bulgaria – increase HCV testing rate

Increase the level of HCV testing among general population:

• Awareness-raising campaigns about HCV infection and testing

• **Enhance interventions for HCV target case finding at the level of primary care providers**

• Scale up existing HCV testing at the hospital settings
  - Risk populations
  - Emergency departments
  - Surgery departments
  - Obstetric clinics, In Vitro clinics etc
Bulgaria – increase HCV testing rate

Increase the level of HCV testing among PWID

- HRDU – 31,316 pts (6.0 per 1000), 2012
- OST programmes – 3,563 pts, 2016
- NSPs - 8,907 pts

Prevalence of anti HCV Ab among PWID (%)

- Syringe provision (thousands)
- Opioid substitution clients

Highly targeted responses
- Heroin-assisted treatment: No
- Peer Naloxone: No
- Drug consumption rooms: No

Geographical distribution of NSP (%)
Bulgaria – increase HCV testing rate

Increase the level of HCV testing among PWID:

• HCV testing should be implemented in every existing HRS – using POT
• All OST programmes should be involved in antiviral treatment
• Rising awareness among HRSs providers for new antiviral treatment options available in the country is required
• Multidisciplinary collaboration between addiction specialists and gastroenterologists should be scale up
  - better linkage to care
  - successful treatment
  - strong arguments in future negotiation with health authorities
Bulgaria – increase number of treated patients

http://polarisobservatory.org/polaris/dash.htm
HCV infection in Bulgaria – summary

• The prevalence of HCV infection is low (1.28%), but national epidemiological survey is necessary

• Enhancing targeted testing interventions on HCV case detection in primary care services and in other healthcare facilities is required

• IVDUs currently is the main transmission road of HCV infection

• Testing rates among PWID are low and the level of undetected and untreated cases remain high

• All HCV – positive patients, health insured have an universal access to DAA treatment

• A government-led, -coordinated and -funded approach is a precondition for implementing a successful national plan on HCV screening, diagnosis and treatment