

”The Circle” Group Model

Author: Ronni Marks

Email: ronnimarks24@gmail.com



BACKGROUND

The Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group, Inc. was founded by a patient to address the lack of education and supportive services for people living with Hepatitis C and/or co-infected with HIV.

AIM

HCMSG’s “The Circle” groups address the basic needs of all people affected by Hepatitis C and those co-infected with HIV, including people who currently and formerly injected drugs. After gaining their trust, we encourage each person to be tested for Hepatitis C in response to what is clearly a connection between the use of injection drugs and Hepatitis C. The participants who test positive are then navigated through the system with the goal of receiving treatment for Hepatitis C and to endeavor to reduce the harm of injection drug use through The Hepatitis C Education and Support Group Assistance Program. The clients are identified through programs, such as weekly syringe exchanges.

METHODS

The Circle groups provide a non-hostile environment where they are given hygiene safety kits to reduce the harm of infection and to encourage a healthy lifestyle. There is no judgment of lifestyle in these groups and participants are treated with respect encouraging them to make healthy choices. There is a generation of young people who have become infected with Hepatitis C through injecting opiates and other drugs sharing syringes. Education in regard to transmission is necessary for this population in a non-judgmental environment. Using HCMSG's mission and goals, we provide insight and direction into providing options and developing effective ways to educate, engage and retain people in care and treatment. Our goal is to empower them to be in charge of their overall health.

CONCLUSION

If you are interested in starting “The Circle” at your organization, please follow the steps below:

1. Register at www.hepatitismsg.org/circuleregistration.html
2. Discuss specific needs of your organization with HCMSG
3. Provide necessary feedback using the questions below:
 - How many participants came into group as a result of a program like syringe exchange?
 - Were incentives necessary to encourage them to attend The Circle group?
 - How many stayed in group, attended more than once, referred others?
 - How many had already been tested? How many were you able to get tested? How long did it take to get them to agree?
 - How many were linked to care? How long did it take for their first appointment? Were they prepared because of knowledge gained in group? How many were adherent to Hepatitis medication?
 - Cured and beyond- Have many have been informed on follow up and risk of re-infection?
 - How has being cured impacted their health and life after cure?

RESULTS

Community based organizations are able to make an impact with patients and providers. Educational groups and supportive patient mentoring services are important elements in the cascade of successful and cost effective medical care. These programs provide the knowledge and tools to enable participants to continue this work in their various communities. Additional research is required.

“The Circle” impacts communities in New York and nationwide through the collaboration of organizations such as:

Hawaii Department of Health

Hep Free Hawaii

Hawaii Health and Harm Center

ekiM for change syringe exchange Greenville, NC

Positively Living/Project Act, Knoxville, TN.