Qualitative study of the decisions and experiences of people who inject drugs who received a liver disease assessment as part of a liver health promotion campaign: The LiveRLife Study

A.D. Marshall\textsuperscript{a}, C. Treloar\textsuperscript{b}, G.J. Dore\textsuperscript{a}, J. Grebely\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} The Kirby Institute, UNSW Australia, NSW, Australia
\textsuperscript{b} Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia, NSW, Australia

LiveRLife Campaign (2014)

Tailored liver health promotion campaign designed to enhance liver disease assessments (FibroScan\textsuperscript{®}) in the drug and alcohol setting among persons with a history of injection drug use

Study Population

- Prospective cohort design
- Aged ≥ 18 years, history of IDU
- No liver biopsy or FibroScan\textsuperscript{®} in prior two years
- No current or previous HCV Tx

Recruitment

- 1 healthcare facility, 2 OSTs & 1 injecting centre in New South Wales
LiveRLife baseline population (n=253)

- Avg. age 43 yrs., 68% male, 23% ATSI, 75% HCV* (68% RNA*)
- 71% injected in the past month
- 60% returned for 2-4wk. LiveRLife follow-up
- 19% advanced fibrosis (≥F3)
- $P<0.001$ preferred FibroScan®
Qualitative follow-up study (2015 – 2016)

The study aims were to assess...
- Motivations for receiving a liver disease assessment
- Understanding of hepatitis C and its association with liver disease
- Interpretation of FibroScan® score and subsequent health behaviours

Health Literacy: the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health (WHO, 2016)

Methods

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mild/mod. fibrosis (F1/F2)</th>
<th>Advanced fibrosis (F3/F4)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended follow-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>No follow-up</td>
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Study Population
Participation in LiveRlife FibroScan® score

Data Collection
2 OSTs, 1 injecting centre
Semi-structured interviews
Audio-recorded; transcribed
Results

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mild/mod. fibrosis (F1/F2)</th>
<th>Advanced fibrosis (F3/F4)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended follow-up</td>
<td>11 (77)</td>
<td>12 (22)</td>
<td>23 (99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No follow-up</td>
<td>8 (60)</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
<td>10 (73)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19 (137)</td>
<td>14 (35)</td>
<td>33 (172)</td>
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</tbody>
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Study Population
Participation in LiveRlife FibroScan® score

Data Collection
2 OSTs, 1 injecting centre
Semi-structured interviews
Audio-recorded; transcribed
Thematic analysis

Results (n=33)

70% returned for follow-up
61% injected in past mon.
42% advanced fibrosis (≥F3)

Average age 48
Male 79%
ATSI 21%
HCV+ 70%

Government assistance 88%
Completed high school or higher education 30%
Unstable housing 12%
Ever been in prison 61%
Motivation to receive liver disease assessment

- Opportunity to gain access to new knowledge

*Just to check the liver to see how it was because I knew I had the hep.*

  - James, F1/F2, follow-up, age 54 yrs.

- Incorrect connections between drug use and chronic liver disease
  - Supported by baseline LiveRLife data (knowledge survey)
  - Sources of incorrect health knowledge

*I wanted to really see how the drugs really do affect your liver.*

  - Sam, F1/F2, follow-up, age 47 yrs.

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Interpretation of FibroScan® score

- The majority had a correct interpretation of liver disease based on score

*[The healthcare practitioners] said it was in good condition for someone who's been using like I have. The only drug I use is amphetamines now; they're probably the better ones for you.*

  - Jack, F1/F2, follow-up age 59 yrs.

- Scores prompted discussions regarding health behaviours

*I: As soon as you found out your score, did you tell anyone?*

*P: I went up to [nearby clinic] and I saw my doctor and let [them] know and then from there. I slowly reduced on my alcohol drinking.*

  - Stacy, F1/F2, follow-up, age 32 yrs.
Interpretation of FibroScan® score

• FibroScan® scores changed perceptions of health (+/-) for some
• Linkage to HCV therapies was prominent in healthcare discussions

It’s only because of the feedback, the FibroScan® I’ve had done...all that has made me just keep wanting to go forward.

- Derek, F1/F2, no follow-up, age 52 yrs.

I just imagined that it would be less than what it was and I was shocked...they showed me on the scale where it was...straight away I started panicking. I didn’t think it would be anywhere near that bad...I didn’t show any signs of hep C.

- Jacob, F3/F4, follow-up, age 47 yrs.

Interpretation of FibroScan® score

• Importance of developing a tool that can be understood by others
• FibroScan® scorecard served as a visual reminder

I remember that this was the first FibroScan® that really told me a lot...my mother saw it and then she pointed out where I was...the degree of cirrhosis, it made me definitely want to follow up with [HCV] treatment. Hearing it but then seeing it in front of my eyes...it just seemed to be two completely different things...I’d never really been clean in any part of my adult life until that piece of paper.

- Paul, F3/F4, follow-up, aged 43 yrs.
Discussion

Health Literacy

- Confusion about drug use and connection to liver health persists
  - Impacts health-seeking behaviours?
- Targeted liver health education for various subgroups
- Managing patient expectations of FibroScan® scores post-Tx
- Loss to research follow-up ≠ lack of engagement in services
- Visual, tangible FibroScan® scorecard helped to improve capacity to understand & apply new knowledge

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LiveRLife Participants

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MERCK
Be well