

STD Clinic Adds New Hepatitis C Testing and Finds Significant, Previously Unknown Infections (Baltimore, Maryland)



As a Baltimore native, Mckinley was aware of the services available at the Baltimore City Health Department. He frequently utilized the Baltimore City Health Department's (BCHD) Druid Health Center and Eastern Health Center as his source of medical care since he was one of the many without insurance prior to the Affordable Care Act. During one routine visit, a new screening test was offered to him, a point-of-care test for hepatitis C. At that time Mckinley did not know much about hepatitis C but as a baby boomer it was recommended that he consider accepting this new screening test given his age.

To his surprise, he was found to be infected with hepatitis C and found himself unsure of what that meant for him. As a part of the Johns Hopkins University/BCHD Hepatitis Testing and Linkage to care project, Mckinley not only received education and initial evaluation and care for hepatitis C by clinicians at the Druid Health Center, he was also linked with the project coordinator for assistance with navigating the health insurance system and linkage to a hepatitis specialist.

Since first being diagnosed with hepatitis C at the Druid Health Center last August, Mckinley has since secured health insurance coverage and been linked to a viral hepatitis specialist at the Johns Hopkins Hospital for initiation of hepatitis C antiviral treatment. Although he states that "it's still hard to make some of the changes I need in my life to deal with the hep", with the guidance of those at the Druid Health Center and assistance from groups such as Help-4-Hep, Mckinley knows that he's not dealing with this alone and has those who are here to support him through the process.

- Anyone can get hepatitis C, but adults born from 1945 through 1965 are 5 times more likely to have hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is mostly spread through contact with an infected person's blood. Some people could have gotten infected before widespread screening of blood began in 1992. People who have injected drugs, even if only once in the past, could have been infected with the virus from sharing a needle or drug equipment with someone who had hepatitis C. Most people do not know how or when they were infected.
- Getting tested can help people learn if they are infected and get them into lifesaving care and treatment. Treatments are available that can eliminate the virus from the body and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis, and even liver cancer.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with funding from the CDC Foundation's Viral Hepatitis Action Coalition, is funding a project at the Baltimore City Health Department's Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) clinic to identify patients who may have hepatitis C and not be aware of it. The project setting serves the potential target audience of baby boomers. In 2013, the clinic's patients were largely adults aged 18-70 years-old, predominantly African-American, and medically underserved.





Baltimore City Health Department's (BCHD) Druid Health Center and Eastern Health Center assist Mckinley concerning hepatitis C.

- Patients who come into the clinic are shown an educational video in the waiting room about the hepatitis C virus and then offered a rapid HCV test. If the rapid test comes back positive with the virus, the patient is then seen by a nurse practitioner or physician assistant to have post-test counseling and then schedule a follow-up appointment in 1-2 weeks. During the return appointment, patients receive more education on HCV and treatment options as well as are assisted with identifying and/or applying for insurance. The project coordinator also assist the patient in lining up follow-up services and care.
- With a modest investment of \$250,000, this one-year project is already yielding important results. Between June 2013 and October 2013, more than 1,300 patients have received HCV testing. Of that, 7.7% of the males and 5.2% of females seen at the clinic have tested positive for HCV infection. The prevalence rate for patients born between 1945 through 1965 was 30.7%; 5.8% overall for African-Americans and 24% for Caucasians. The clinic also found a very high prevalence rate (88.6%) of hepatitis C among patients who have a history of injection drug use.
- This project demonstrates that using an existing health-care setting such as an STD clinic is an effective way to identify people previously unaware of their HCV status and link them to potentially live-saving care and treatment. Plans are to potentially expand the HCV testing to other sites in the city as well as study the feasibility of offering onsite treatment.



Staff picture from back row left to right: Lisa Thompson, Virginia Key-el, Stacey Dennis, Patricia Pencil, Eve Deinlein, Michelle Crawford, Jackline Lasola, Della Duncan, Oluwaseun Falade-Nwulia, Vonda Colson, Jayne Blumenthal, Jaeson Smith, Robert Cheeks, and Nakia Robertson.



Baltimore STD Clinic Waiting room.

For more information on hepatitis C, please visit: www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis