

Is there a need for hepatitis-informed counselling in the era of new DAA treatments?

Background

Hepatitis NSW's specialised counselling service **Let's Talk** was established in July 2013 and has so far supported over **150 clients** via on-going cost-free telephone, online Skype or face-to-face counselling sessions.

The *Let's Talk* service trains and supervises **professional counsellors who work on a volunteer basis**, to deliver regular **hepatitis-informed counselling** sessions to individuals and families affected by **viral hepatitis**. It has been observed that since the roll out of new treatments the need for **hepatitis-informed counselling remains evident**.

Activity and outcomes

Delivering hepatitis-informed counselling support to affected individuals works well as a complimentary care service, adding holistic care components to the work of medical professionals and social workers at liver clinics and other medical services across the state of NSW. We are not only assisting clients around hepatitis C management and treatment, but addressing long-term mental and emotional health issues, particularly with clients who had a long-term infection history and significant liver damage related to hepatitis.

This service effectively provides informed, person-centred, solution-focused counselling support to clients at all stages of their hepatitis journey:

- emotional support to clients who are newly diagnosed;
- informed decision-making;
- preparing for treatment for hepatitis C;
- while on treatment;
- during post-treatment recovery;
- living with advanced liver disease, and ;
- clients pre- and post-liver transplant.

For clients affected by hepatitis B the *Let's Talk* service provides:

- emotional support around diagnosis and during the acute period;
- informed support around self-management, monitoring and treatment;
- information on life-style choices; and
- support for living well with hepatitis B.

Results

This report analyses the results of Client Satisfaction Surveys that counselling clients submit upon ending counselling relationship and Client Follow-Up Surveys.

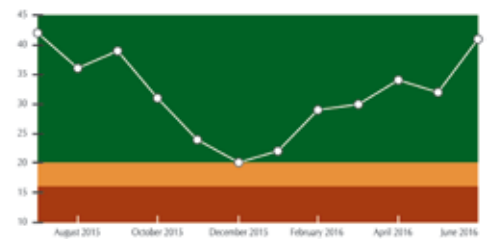
100% of clients reported that sessions positively impacted on their sense of wellbeing.

Our clients say:

"Thanks to the support of my counsellor at Hepatitis NSW, I was able to make some smart decisions and felt that I was accepted and understood instead of being judged or blamed. It was a very positive and helpful experience..."

"Thank you for all the support that your wonderful service provides. My counsellor was kind, compassionate, well-informed and very supportive. Having regular counselling was helpful and I would not have made it through treatment without you!"

Table: # of *Let's Talk* Sessions (July 2015-June 2016)



During March-June, 2016 our counselling team delivered, on average, **30 counselling sessions per month** (1 hour length sessions) to our ongoing clients via telephone, face-to-face and Skype modes of delivery.

In June 2016, we delivered 41 counselling sessions.

Total number of sessions for March-June 2016: 141

Conclusion

By training and closely supervising professional counsellors to deliver telephone, face-to-face and online counselling sessions to hepatitis-affected individuals and families, Hepatitis NSW's counselling program *Let's Talk* has proven to be a service that contributes to improving clients' overall feeling of improved well-being, informed decision making and decreased sense of isolation and stigma.

Since the roll out of new treatments for hepatitis C the need for hepatitis-informed counselling remains evident with steady or increasing levels of uptake of the service.

Seeking emotional support during tough times is a sign of responsibility, self-awareness, care and maturity - not a sign of weakness.



Lila Pesa, Counselling Coordinator (PO E&CS) for *Let's Talk* Counselling at HNSW

Hepatitis Helpline 1800 803 990

phone 02 9332 1853 | email lpesa@hep.org.au | PO Box 432 Darlinghurst NSW 1300 | website hep.org.au

July 2016