

HEPATITIS B TESTING AND DIAGNOSIS EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WITH HEPATITIS B AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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Background: In Australia, Chronic Hepatitis B (CHB) disproportionately affects people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While a National Hepatitis B Testing policy has been developed, no formal evaluation has been conducted to identify its utility. Evidence suggests that people with CHB have limited understanding of their infection. This study explored experiences of hepatitis B testing and diagnosis from the perspective of people with CHB, General Practitioners (GPs) and practice nurses.

Methods: Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with people with CHB (n=19), GPs (n=15) and practice nurses (n=5). The health professionals self-identified as having a high-case load of patients with CHB (> one patient per month). Interviews were conducted over the phone and face to face; seven people with CHB were interviewed with an interpreter.

Results: The research found that people with CHB had various testing, diagnosis, and knowledge acquisition experiences. The length of time since diagnosis affected the amount of information received: people diagnosed 15 – 25 years ago received less information, than those diagnosed more recently. Regardless of when people were diagnosed, few respondents received pre-test information. How the diagnosis was conveyed, and their ability to absorb information given levels of shock affected their follow up with liver specialists.

General practitioners displayed varying degrees of knowledge about hepatitis B and the importance of ongoing monitoring and surveillance, while practice nurses were more aware of the needs of this population.

Conclusion: There are clear expectations outlined in the National Hepatitis B Testing policy of how hepatitis B should be tested and diagnosed; none of the participants involved in this study reported being diagnosed in line with these expectations and none of the health professionals noted the testing policy as a resource informing their practice.

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