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The Dutch National Hepatitis Practice Plan

Martijn Sijbom

Dutch College of General Practitioners, Department of Guideline Development and Research, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Corresponding author: Dr Martijn Sijbom, Dutch College of General Practitioners, Guideline Development And Research, Utrecht, The Netherlands. E-mail: M.sijbom@nhg.org

Background: The identification and treatment of hepatitis B and C can be improved. In the Netherlands, approximately 40,000 and 28,100 patients are infected with hepatitis B or hepatitis C respectively and a large part has not yet been identified. The identification of hepatitis B and C even decreased from 1892 patients in 2003 to 1331 patients in 2013. Furthermore, the time between initial diagnosis and referral to a hepatitis specialist is too long. This can be harmful as long-term complications of untreated hepatitis B and C, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma, occur in up to 25% of cases after 25 years. The mortality has increased from approximately 450 in 2003 to 500 patients in 2013, whereas the effectiveness of treatment of hepatitis B and C has been improved up to 90% last years.

Method: To improve the identification and treatment of hepatitis B and C in the Netherlands, all stakeholders were invited to join the national hepatitis practice plan taskforce and were asked to write an action plan for all hepatitis related services. The main objective is to increase the numbers of identification and referrals to a hepatitis specialist. Furthermore, working procedures and results of best local practices on collaboration between primary care providers and specialists were collected.

Results: All stakeholders joined the taskforce. A practice plan was written and presented at the Dutch National Hepatitis Conference on October 1, 2015. All stakeholders were asked to authorize and implement the plan. The practice plan, working procedures on how to improve collaboration and results of local practices will be published on a public website soon.

Conclusion: It is feasible to draft a hepatitis practice plan with all stakeholders within 1 year. The effects on identification of hepatitis B and C, morbidity and mortality need to be evaluated.