

Working with the:



HEP C u Later

The Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service:

Putting people's health at the heart of the
community drug and alcohol services

In May 2025, Hep C U Later spoke to Georgina O'Connor and Gavin Jones from the Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS), about their efforts to improve the health and lives of people accessing their community drug and alcohol treatment services through their blood borne-virus work. We also spoke to them about their ambitious collaborations with healthcare organisations, as well as vital harm reduction initiatives.

Wales are fighting hepatitis C:

GDAS are on a mission to help Wales eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat, in line with the World Health Organisation's global ambition.

The health board, Aneurin Bevan, have a target of providing hepatitis C treatment to 80 people each year and GDAS helped 53 people to be treated in the last year alone. Although Georgina believes the prevalence of chronic hepatitis C has reduced due to increased efforts, she has recognised that new approaches may be needed to find people living with hepatitis C who may be unaware they have the infection.

Recently, the GDAS team have held an incentivised two-week testing event in Newport, South Wales, and found 5 people needing hepatitis C treatment - all of whom were negative for hepatitis C six months ago. For Georgina, this underpins the importance of regular re-testing. Four of those identified as having hepatitis C had been treated before and it is believed they acquired the infection through crack pipe use - a route of transmission which they are seeing more often.

"They all love it, especially if they come in and see it, they used to have to wait for a PCR for 4-6 weeks, and sometimes you'll be waiting and the lab will come back to you and say the reflex testing has had a mechanical failure and you have to find them again....its so quick that you manage to keep them engaged and they can visibly see, they're seeing the swab and Cepheid machine, they're buying into it, they enjoy it, they like it."

Georgina

The GDAS service use point-of-care testing, recently sourcing a Cepheid GeneXpert machine. Since the end of June, they have completed 231 point-of-care tests, 85 of which were in the last few weeks.

They have completed 63 Cepheid tests with 12 people being identified as needing treatment for hepatitis C from testing within GDAS premises.



Georgina O'Connor
BBV Lead/Clinical Specialist



Gavin Jones
Head of Operations & Kaleidoscope
Harm Reduction Lead

People who are experiencing homelessness and have been identified as having a positive hepatitis C result, are started on treatment immediately. Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABUHB) and Hepatology Nurse Specialist Gavin Hardcastle, hold medicines (over-labelled stock) in the Royal Gwent Hospital Pharmacy, enabling them to 'close the gap' of waiting times and engage people immediately in the treatment pathway.

Their approach of providing the first few weeks' worth of treatment is essential for encouraging adherence and relationship building, increasing the likelihood of people taking the rest of the medication over 12 weeks. For people who are housed, they arrange for Home Care to provide the treatment, which does take slightly longer to arrive.

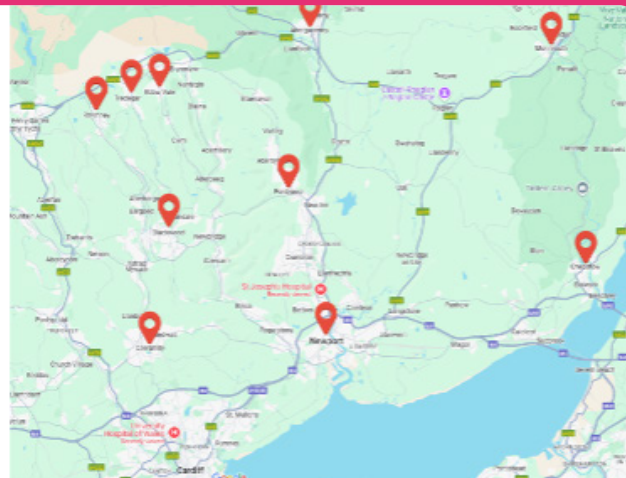
Georgina spoke of the excellent working relationship with Gavin Hardcastle, Clinical Nurse Specialist from hepatology (Aneurin Bevan Health Board), who provides an extremely flexible and responsive service. The value of this joint working is the minimisation of people having to travel to hospital appointments, and lowering the risk of missed appointments.

The GDAS team bring testing to other organisations to make hepatitis C testing as accessible as possible. An example of which is a recent testing event at Caerphilly probation, where the probation staff encouraged attendees to be tested. This resulted in 12 people being tested that day. They are currently in the process of launching custody testing with the local police and already have a vending machine in place to provide needles and syringes.

Testing is offered throughout the health board at multiple GDAS sites located in:

- Newport
- Caerphilly
- Pontypool
- Blackwood
- Ebbw Vale
- Rhymney
- Tredegar
- Chepstow
- Monmouth
- Abergavenny

Testing has also been offered during High Intensity Test and Treat Events at hostels when working alongside the Sexual Health team within the Health Board



"It's a question of 'striking while the iron's hot', while they are in treatment and engaging, 'we've identified you as being hepatitis C positive - we're going to treat you now'."

Georgina



Gavin Hardcastle
Clinical Nurse Specialist,
Hepatology

“It’s just taken so long to get rid of the bad stigma of the older medications because everyone was so against it to start with, and we’ve had the new medications since 2014/2015 it’s only in the last 3-4 years that people are saying ‘oh the new meds are actually that bad’. We’ve got a couple of cases where they’re just refusing the treatment, it doesn’t matter what we say or offer...they’re working so hard on their recovery...”

Georgina

The Health Board bus is also in the process of being launched, meaning the team, sexual health and hepatology staff will be able to deliver multiple harm reduction interventions during outreach Gwent-wide, particularly in complex and rural areas.

This will include the delivery of blood borne virus (BBV) testing, naloxone, needle and syringe provision, sexual health testing and vouchers on a likely monthly basis.

GDAS have approximately 43 peers who provide harm reduction and groupwork across the extensive Gwent geography. The ultimate aim is to upskill peers to be able to provide dry blood spot testing in the community alongside needle and syringe provision and naloxone distribution.

Making healthcare accessible:

The GDAS service have a vision of ensuring healthcare is accessible to everyone attending their services. One initiative, provided by Jane Fouweather, Specialist Sexual Health Nurse (Seconded from Aneurin Bevan UHB to GDAS), is focused on providing sexual health testing, advice, contraception and smears. Gavin and Georgina spoke of how the integration of sexual health and other healthcare interventions work well because they sit alongside other already existing pathways and processes at the service. For example, aligning chlamydia and gonorrhoea testing with the urine drug screening means opportunistic testing can take place without additional appointments.

“We all want the same thing. We’re all trying to target the same thing. So why do we not work together? And we’ve got that now with sexual health and with hepatology. So why not bring in a TB aspect because there’s a lot of our clients that have suffered or been ill, or they are currently being medicated for TB.”

Georgina

Not only does Jane provide an essential service on-site, but the team have sexual health (‘test and post’) kits they can provide to people when there is no sexual health clinic.

Gavin Jones and Jane Fouweather also provide sexual health and substance use training, where staff are shown what is involved with each sexual health test to build confidence amongst the workforce.



"I think it helps that we get the 'test and post' kits out in the session and show people what they look like, show people what a smear brush looks like, so that they can see exactly what it is. It's breaking down those barriers."

Gavin

other basic needs, such as such as managing withdrawal, arranging housing and sourcing food - which makes the robust package of care at the service even more essential to prevent

Within the service, syphilis testing is available through dry blood spot testing. If there is a positive result, the service refers immediately to sexual health services for further screening and support. Equally, the service is making progress with TB screening. A new member of the TB screening service, Liz Weeks (respiratory health at Aneurin Bevan Health Board) is providing a much-needed service for people who are at an increased risk of TB.

When Gavin and Georgina were asked whether they thought people accessing the services noticed the new collaborations with healthcare providers and the increase in interventions they spoke of how they aided the building of trust within the professional relationship.

Additionally, they believe that healthcare can sometimes be a lower priority for people over

Reducing harm:

Gavin Jones spoke of the importance of monitoring emerging drug trends, to be able to respond quickly to the needs of people using different substances, as well as reducing the harms which may be caused from changes to injecting practices - such as increases in BBV transmission. A national harm reduction meeting is in planning to draw together key stakeholders, information and resources across Wales.

High on the agenda for GDAS is addressing the harms caused from ketamine. Working alongside Rebecca Saunders, a Urology Consultant, and Jess Clark, a Specialist Liaison Nurse at GDAS, they hope to set up a Ketamine pathway to address the gaps in care.

"When we had mephedrone last time the hepatitis rate went up massively because of the amount of re-injecting so we're keeping an eye on that. We've got good relationships with the police so if border force start seizing it they'll tell us."

Gavin

They identified over a 100 people across Gwent with physical health issues resulting from ketamine use. Now, a specific clinic is being planned where the services can work jointly and referrals can be made directly into the GDAS service. This initiative will likely mean they can engage with people who wouldn't have otherwise come into contact with community drug and alcohol treatment services.



Georgina O'Connor and Jane Fouweather

The service are exploring how to engage better with people involved in chemsex, recognising that some people may not want to attend drug treatment services and therefore, new approaches are needed. Their starting place is attending Pride, to survey people on what substances they are using, as well as how and where they are being used to ensure the service they offer is meeting their needs. They also want invite people from the community to training to help educate about how to reduce harm.

Who are GDAS?

Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service operate in South Wales (Home - Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service). You can find out more about the services they offer here: [Services Offered - Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service](#)



Aspirations for the future:

GDAS are awaiting approval from the home office to be able to provide drug testing on site. This will enable them to reduce harm through providing information to people accessing services around what substances are in the drugs they may be taking.

One of the aspirations of the service is the provision of crack pipes which, so far, has come up against some challenges but would be a vital step to reduce BBV transmission from sharing pipes.

"GDAS are making great progress against the Eliminating Hepatitis B & C as a Public Health Threat in Gwent Three-Year Action Plan 2025-2028, working with key partners in Aneurin Bevan Health Board and Public Health Wales to test and treat as many people as we can including those who are not known to treatment agencies. Our trained peers are a valuable part of increasing our reach alongside our assertive outreach teams and community staff."

Kaleidoscope remain committed to the Welsh Government's mission to eliminate Hepatitis by 2030 and are working across Wales to reduce new infections by 90% and reduce Hep C related deaths by 65%. We can't do this in isolation so working in partnership with Public Health Wales, Health Boards, Hep C Trust, Hep C U Later, Housing partners and other voluntary sector providers is integral.

Providing good needle exchange programmes is vital. We know that since CV19 we have work to do to increase exchange activity across Wales. Initiatives such as NEX click and deliver services are working well alongside enhancing our offer in both community and fixed base exchanges. We remain hopeful that we can address the spread of BBV's via the delivery of crack pipes and inhalation devices across Welsh exchanges, working with Welsh Government and Area Planning Boards to make this a reality."

Rondine Molinaro, Kaleidoscope CEO

GDAS are on a quest to not only eliminate hepatitis C but to reduce harm wherever possible.



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