



Feasibility and Acceptability of Hepatitis C Virus Counseling and Rapid Testing in the Criminal Justice Setting; Preliminary Results



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Background

- Given the high burden of HCV infection among incarcerated populations, there is a public health urgency to integrate HCV testing, prevention, and linkage to HCV health services into jail and prison-based health programs.
- Despite the high prevalence of HCV within correctional facilities in the U.S., routine HCV testing in jails and prisons is not the standard of care.
- HCV testing is typically only conducted among:
 - HIV-infected inmates
 - Inmates with underlying liver disease
 - Inmates who report high risk-behaviors such as injection drug use
- The approval of the rapid HCV test creates the opportunity to expand HCV testing within jails and other facilities.
- Knowledge of HCV status provides an opportunity for infected persons to:
 - Learn about HCV
 - Reduce substance use and sexual transmission behaviors
 - Receive hepatitis A and B vaccinations,
 - Learn about the risks of alcohol and tobacco use
 - Complete evaluation for HCV treatment inside the correctional setting and/or be linked to care providers upon release

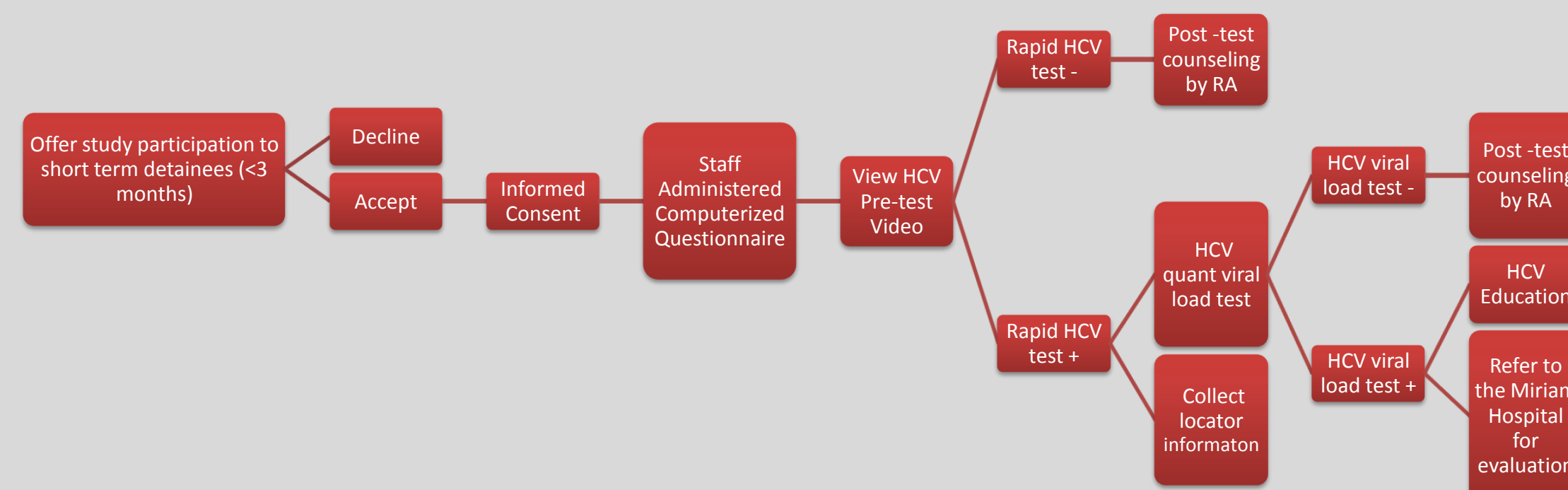
Objective

- The primary objectives of this research are to assess:
 - The use of an HCV pre-test educational video within the correctional setting
 - The feasibility and acceptability of rapid HCV testing among 250 short-term inmates of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections
 - Whether persons diagnosed with chronic active HCV infection will link to a community provider for evaluation of HCV treatment

Methods

- We created a brief (<10 minute) pre-test counseling informational video that provides a general overview of HCV including:
 - Modes of transmission
 - The importance of getting tested for HCV/who should be tested for HCV
 - An explanation of the rapid HCV test
 - An explanation of the meaning of reactive and non-reactive rapid HCV test results
 - An explanation of confirmatory testing procedures for persons with a reactive rapid HCV test
 - A brief overview of HCV care and treatment
- A convenience sample of short-term inmates was used. Individuals with known HCV infection were excluded.

Study algorithm:



- Community and Department of Corrections medical records of study participants identified as having chronic active hepatitis C will be reviewed to collect relevant data on viral hepatitis medical appointments, testing, and treatment.
- The study was approved by the Miriam Hospital IRB, the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Medical Research Advisory Group, and the Office for Human Research Protections at the DHHS.

Hepatitis C Pre-Test Educational Video

“I’ve heard of Hep C but I don’t really know much about it.”

“Hepatitis C is five times more common than HIV.”

“Hep C and drinking is like a 1–2 punch to your liver, it can wreck your liver.”

“Hep C is spread by blood that has the hep C virus in it.”

“If you shoot up, there’s a good chance you have Hep C.”

“Are there other ways you can get Hep C?”

“Don’t share razors or toothbrushes with someone who has Hep C because sometimes there could be small amounts of blood on them.”

“You cannot get Hep C from casual contact—things like hugging and kissing. Don’t worry about that stuff.”

“I had no idea I was infected with Hep C. I felt fine.”

“Most people who are infected with Hep C, don’t even have any symptoms.”

“You need to get an antibody test.”

“An anti-what?”

“About 1 in 7 people get rid of the virus on their own, without treatment.”

“If the first test that looks for antibodies is positive, you need to have a second test—the viral load test.”

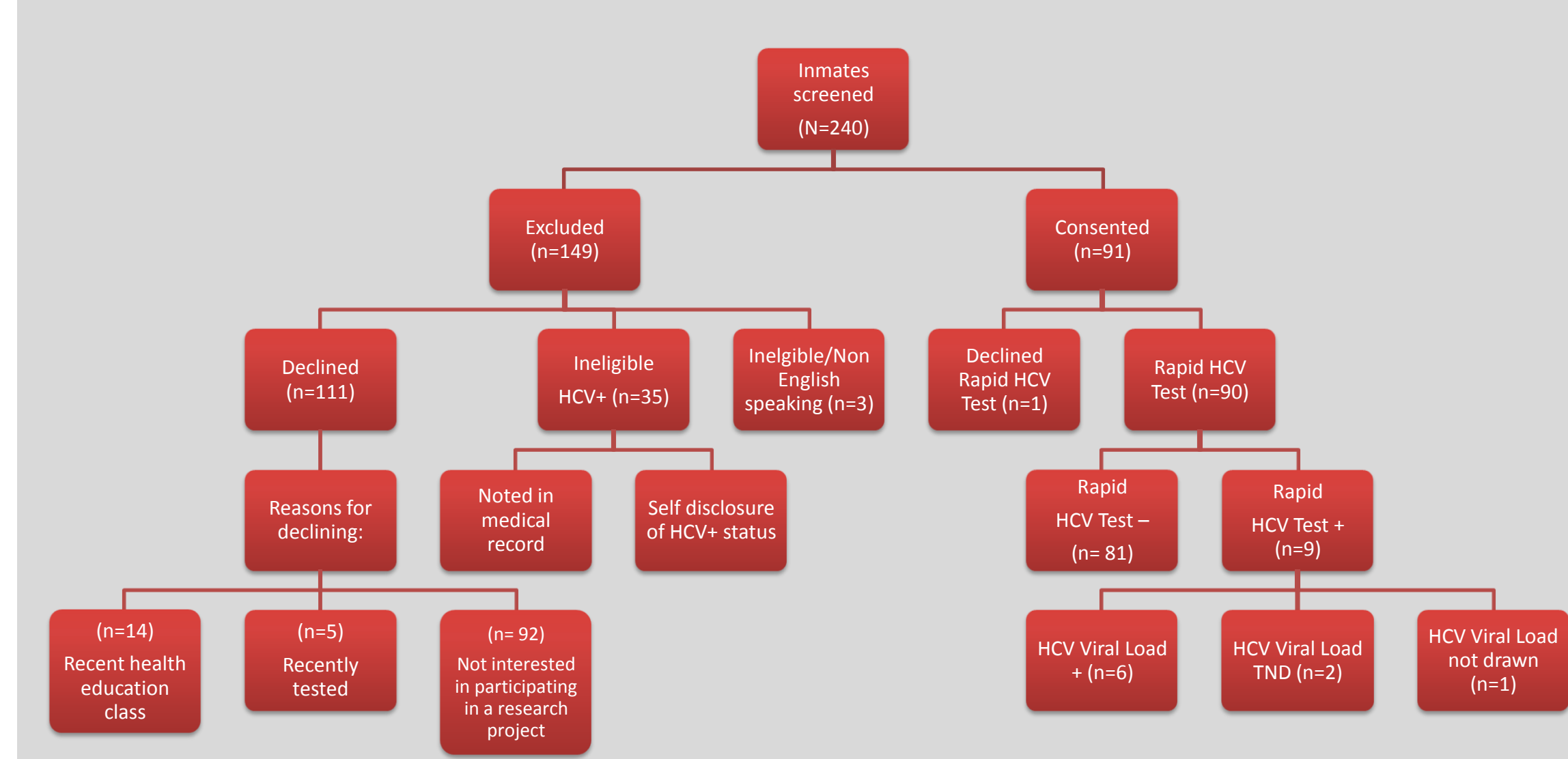
“So how does the test work?”

“We take the drop of blood and put it in the test.”

“Stop doing stuff to hurt your liver. Stop shooting drugs. Stop drinking alcohol. Get treatment for your addiction.”

“Hepatitis C is no joke!”

Preliminary Results



Positive Rapid Test	Viral Load Test Results	Referral for Care	Presented for Appointment
1	24,850	Yes	No
2	1,600,000	Yes	Yes
3	266	Yes	No
4	347,063	Pending; Out of State Referral	N/A
5	147,103	Yes	Pending
6	5,712,416	Yes	Still incarcerated
7	Undetectable	No	N/A
8	Undetectable	No	N/A
9	Released following day; HCV PCR not drawn	Yes	No

Conclusions

- Our preliminary results demonstrate:
 - The use of a brief pre-test video providing information on HCV and rapid testing may help facilitate HCV testing within correctional facilities.
 - Rapid HCV testing is feasible and is successful in identifying previously undiagnosed cases.
 - HCV prevalence is high among incarcerated populations in RI.
 - For persons newly diagnosed with active hepatitis C in this setting, linkage to community care following release from the correctional facility was low. Interventions to facilitate linkage to community care need to be developed.
- Findings from this pilot study will inform the design of larger research trials and the implementation of HCV testing efforts in criminal justice settings.

Contact

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- HCV Pretest video is available at: Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights www.prisonerhealth.org

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