

Engaging stakeholders in a field assessment of a manual for hepatitis C counseling and testing

Gary Chovnick, Dr.PH¹; Rebecca Cabral, Ph.D.²; Danuta Kasprzyk, PH.D.¹; Sue Pearce, M.Ed¹; Linda Wings, MA¹; Kate Blessing¹; Burk Dowell¹.

¹ Battelle Center for Analytics and Public Health, Seattle, ² Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Viral Hepatitis, Atlanta

Background

Hepatitis-C virus (HCV) infection is the most common blood-borne infection in the United States. About 18,000 individuals per year acquire new HCV infections and the current prevalence may be up to 4 million. Because of the high disease burden, low rate of testing, and high proportion of people who become ill without obvious signs, HCV infection has been described as a “silent epidemic.”

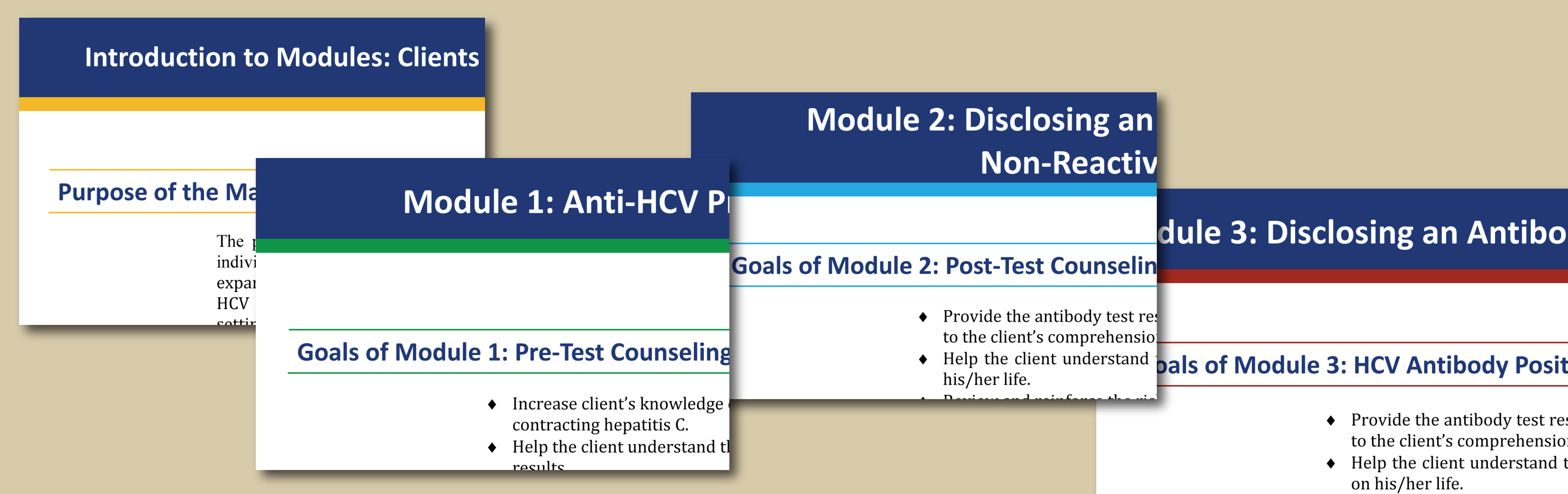
The CDC has recently expanded the national recommendations for the prevention and control of HCV infection.

The new guidelines call for one-time testing for all people born from 1945-1965, the group at highest risk of chronic infection. With the release of the new recommendations and the introduction of the rapid antibody test, hepatitis C testing may become more widespread, thus increasing the need for information and resources. To anticipate the expansion of hepatitis C testing, the CDC is developing a comprehensive manual to provide guidance for HCV counseling and testing. The manual is intended to serve as a resource for clinicians and counselors who wish to test patients for hepatitis C.

About the Manual

The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance for counseling and testing of individuals who are at risk for or potentially infected with hepatitis C. The manual is organized into distinct modules:

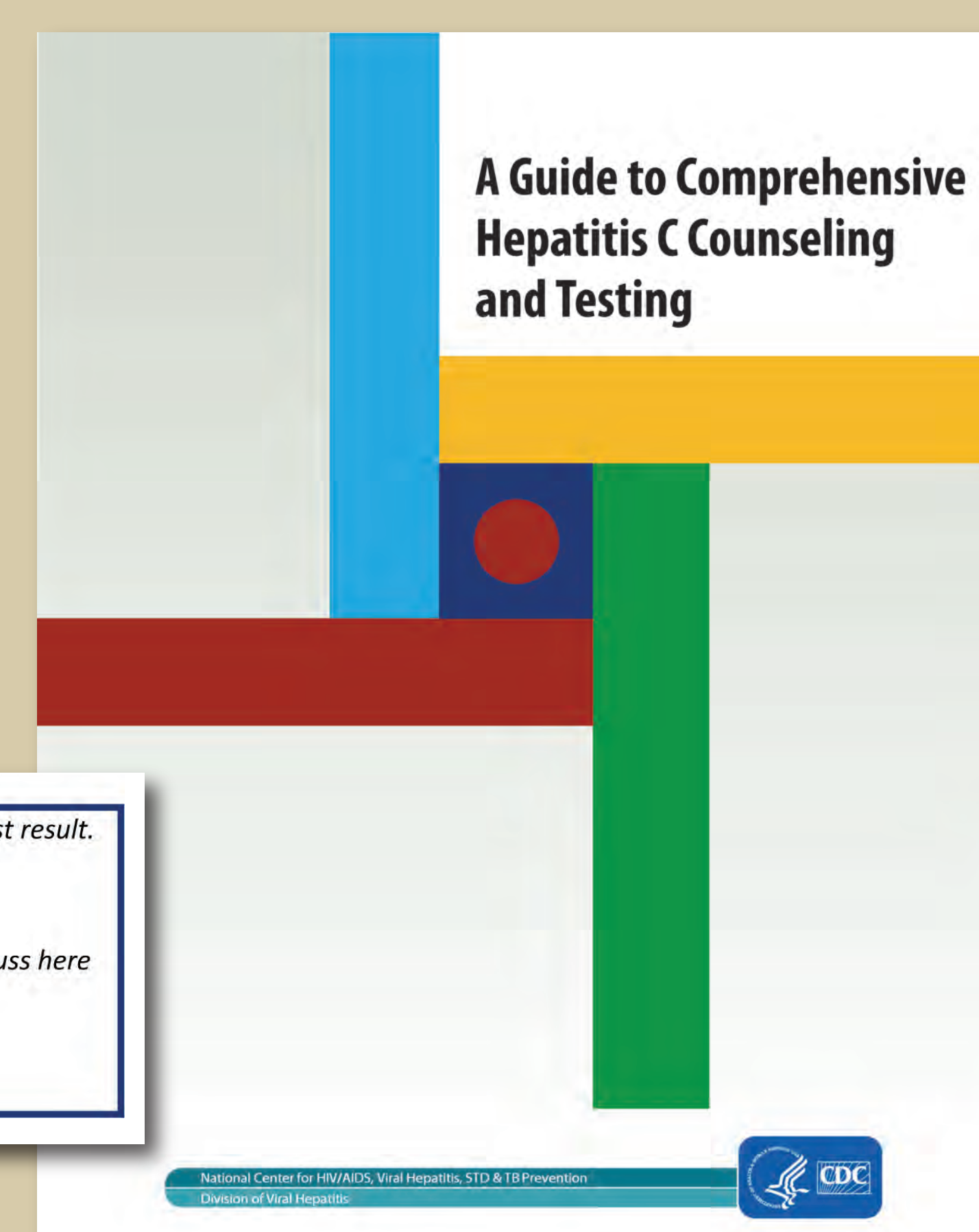
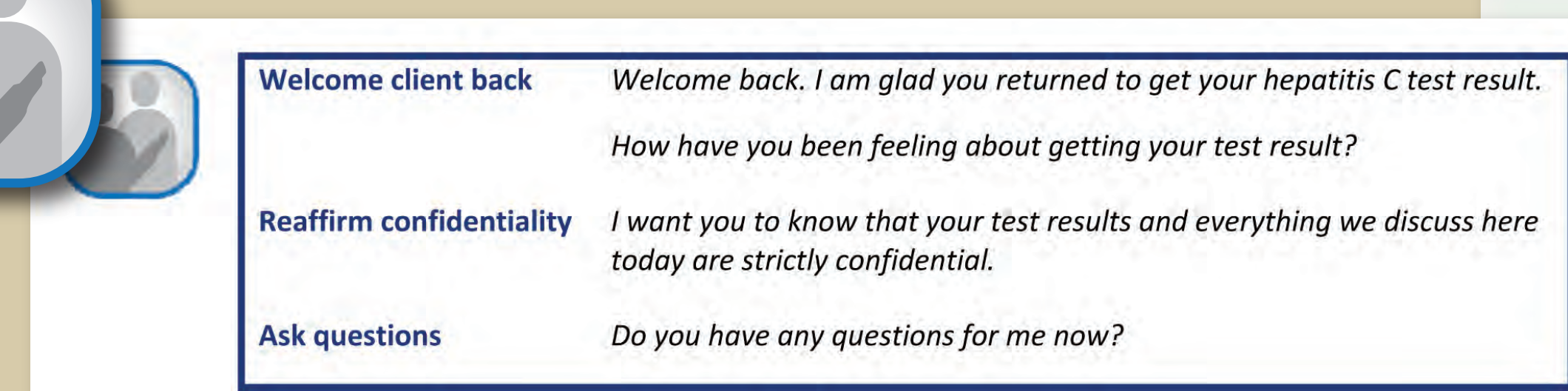
- Introduction to hepatitis C counseling and testing
- Pre-test counseling
- Post –test counseling negative/non-reactive
- Post-test counseling positive/reactive



The modules contain a comprehensive, theory-based approach to communicating with clients about hepatitis C. In addition to education about HCV testing, the initial pre-test session includes a personalized risk assessment that encourages high-risk clients to identify behaviors and circumstances that put them and others at risk for acquiring HCV. The pre-test session allows the counselor to help the client consider ways to reduce personal risk and commit to a plan that is appropriate to their readiness for behavior change. The modules are guided by principles from health behavior change theories, such as the theory of reasoned action, social cognitive theory, and the stages of change (transtheoretical) model.

Features of the manual include:

- Icons for easy recognition of sections
- Sample dialogue to help demonstrate counseling sessions
- Background information about HCV



Field Assessment Methods

To determine the manual's usefulness, a field assessment is being conducted among two distinct stakeholder groups. As part of the field assessment, stakeholders from both groups are being asked to use the manual in the field for four weeks, and then provide feedback on the manual's applicability, functionality, and recommendations for improving it. A mix of organizations, including primary care practices and HCV testing venues are participating.

Group 1: Counselors in public health and community venues likely to reach adults at risk for hepatitis C.

Group 2: Clinicians in primary care settings that reach patients born from 1945 – 1965

- California
- New York
- Ohio
- Washington

- California
- Kansas
- Missouri
- New York
- Texas



Preliminary results

Data are currently being collected across sites. Preliminary results from Group 1 include the following:

- The manual appears to be applicable to a variety of testing situations including standard lab-based and rapid HCV testing.
- The manual will likely be the most useful if it is oriented toward rapid HCV testing.
- The manual seems to work best when testing is conducted on site. In outreach settings that are more fast-paced (i.e. street outreach) a summary protocol would be most useful.
- Respondents appreciate that the manual provides a comprehensive source of hepatitis C information in one document.
- Abbreviated versions of the materials, including fact sheets, check-lists and outlines would be helpful to users of the manual.
- A Spanish version of the manual would be helpful.

Conclusions and Next Steps

- Since there are no standardized protocols for conducting HCV counseling and testing, the CDC manual can provide a useful tool to address the call for routine and risk-based HCV testing.
- At the conclusion of the field assessment, the manual will be revised and posted on the CDC Division of Viral Hepatitis website.

For additional information please contact Gary Chovnick at chovnickg@battelle.org