

ARRESTING THE SPREAD: INFLUENZA VACCINATION FOR PATIENTS IN POLICE CUSTODY

K. Nielsen, Custodial Health Service, Victoria Police



INTRODUCTION

An influenza outbreak in an Australian correctional facility in early 2019 showed that the consequences could be far reaching.

Infection control, isolation capability and management of prisoner movement within the custodial setting was compromised, affecting both patient health outcomes and service delivery.

An opportunity was identified for vaccinating patients in police custody before they moved into the correctional system or were released to freedom, providing improved patient care and reducing both the public health burden and the complexities of prisoner management.

A pilot project was initiated, focusing on patients eligible under the Victorian State Immunisation Schedule and Vaccine Eligibility Criteria 2019 (1,2).

METHOD

All patients received into custody at the Melbourne Custody Centre were screened for eligibility at their initial health screen and assessment. A process map was developed collaboratively by the pharmacist and nurse immunisers to integrate into their existing practices.

This included:

- A simplified eligibility checklist
- Informed consent and documentation
- Safe administration and patient monitoring – staffing, time of day, availability of guards
- Cold chain compliance
- Use of certified nurse immunisers where available

Face-to-face education was carried out by the pharmacist, and nurses were asked to complete a checklist for all eligible patients, regardless of whether they consented to the vaccine.

After a trial period of 4 weeks the program was implemented into standard practice

Process Mapping



Stakeholder Engagement



Trial and Review

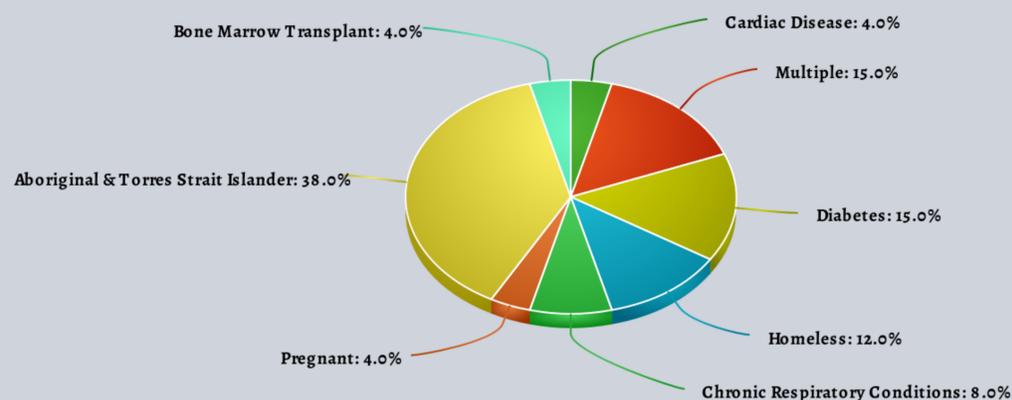


Implementation

RESULTS

A total of 80 patients were screened during the pilot phase, identifying 26 (32%) patients as eligible, with 14 (54%) of these consenting to receiving the vaccine.

Eligibility Criteria Met



Not all patients who consented received the vaccine. due to non-clinical issues such as short notice transfers and release, and staff availability for post vaccine monitoring.

DISCUSSION

- A significant proportion of people entering police custody meet eligibility criteria to receive the state funded influenza vaccine.
- Including vaccination at the initial health assessment of all prisoners is an effective approach despite non-clinical barriers.
- Opportunistic vaccination can increase immunisation rates in a population which would be unlikely to actively seek it out themselves(3)

CONCLUSION

- While prisons routinely vaccinate against influenza, proactively providing this service in police custody could be an effective method of reducing infection rates.
- Public health outcomes are likely to improve whether the patient is transferred into the correctional system (prison) or released to freedom.
- This program should be implemented as a standard part of the healthcare of patients in police custody.

References:

1. <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu>
2. <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/immunisation-schedule-vaccine-eligibility-criteria/immunisation-schedule-victoria>
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; The health of Australia's prisoners, 2018