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CHRONIC HEPATITIS B: AN EXPLORATION OF CURRENT AWARENESS AND PRACTICE IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

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Introduction: Research indicates that knowledge regarding chronic hepatitis B (CHB) is inadequate in general practitioners (GPs). Many GPs are, for example, unaware of the increased risk in CALD populations, the availability of antiviral therapy, or the association of CHB with primary liver cancer. Consequently, too many CHB cases remain undetected or do not receive appropriate care after diagnosis. For example, few women testing positive during pregnancy are followed up after giving birth. Early detection and regular monitoring are crucial in the prevention of CHB-related liver disease. Currently, at least one third of estimated CHB cases in Australia are undiagnosed and <3% receive treatment. The need for increased GP involvement is emphasized in the first National Hepatitis B Strategy, and the aim of this study is to explore gaps in current CHB awareness and practice in North Queensland GPs.

Methods: A questionnaire was constructed covering demographics, barriers, hepatitis B knowledge, antenatal care, awareness of resources, and educational preferences. Some questions represent the theoretical constructs of perceived threat and efficacy to investigate associations with GP decisions. In addition, questions regarding patients from CALD backgrounds, including language issues, are included. All items were checked for acceptability by practicing clinicians. GPs are recruited via the Rural Far North Queensland Division of General Practice website and newsletter.

Results: Data collection and analyses are proceeding but early reports from some GPs indicate a need for broader knowledge of hepatitis B management. Also, community consultation suggests that language and cultural barriers currently hinder effective doctor/patient communication with CALD patients potentially affected by CHB.

Conclusion: The results will lead to recommendations for addressing specific educational needs in North Queensland GPs which will inform the future delivery of the new National Hepatitis B Curriculum in North Queensland and beyond.