

Welcome to the 1st International Symposium on Hepatitis Care in Substance Users

Philip Bruggmann

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1st International Symposium

It's an honour to welcome you here in Zurich in the name of ARUD and especially in the name of the organizing committee of the 1st International Symposium on Hepatitis Care in Substance Users.

Viral hepatitis is one of the most common diseases in patients with substance abuse. An HCV prevalence rate of up to 98% in illicit drug users in Western Europe clearly indicates an epidemic. Despite widely available needle exchange programs in many countries the incidence rates do not decrease as much as in HIV. And despite declining incidence rates hepatitis C related liver morbidity is still increasing in this high risk population. Primary care and especially viral hepatitis care to substance users are underdeveloped in many places and requires a setting adapted to the special circumstances these people live in.

Two years ago, when the first steps to an international network of Hepatitis C care in substance users were initiated, providing Hepatitis C therapy to drug users in Switzerland was a quite lonesome field. I did not know many colleagues in Switzerland dealing with the same problems. Beginning to contact physicians in other countries investigating this population concerning viral hepatitis I've realized a need for an international platform. Meanwhile three expert meetings – along EASL and AASLD – have taken place, international multicenter

studies are in preparation and awareness in the medical and pharmaceutical environment has risen.

The next two days 200 colleagues from 25 countries and five continents will be here in Zurich to learn and discuss about this specific topic, to exchange experience and hopefully to intensify future international collaboration. Overwhelmed by the immense interest in this Symposium we had to enlarge the initial planned capacity from 100 to 200 participants. This is not only a great pleasure for Markus Backmund, Geert Robaey and me of the organizing board but hopefully also a clear signal of interest towards organizers of future hepatological conferences.

A lot of abstracts have been submitted, the decision about their presentation was not only driven by its scientific value and originality but also by its information concerning various regions in the world, as we would like to hear about different situations and problems in giving hepatitis care to substance users. All the accepted abstracts you find in this journal, 9 have been chosen for oral and another 21 for poster presentation.

I hope you will have two extraordinary days in Zurich with a lot of exciting inputs and stimulating personal contacts to take home. In this spirit I wish you an excellent Symposium!

Organizing board

Philip Bruggmann
Markus Backmund
Geert Robaey

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