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Does the detection of Hepatitis C match the distribution of methadone prescriptions and multiple deprivation in Scotland?

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Does the detection of Hepatitis C match the distribution of methadone prescriptions and multiple deprivation in Scotland?

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Introduction: By December 2006, approximately one in 260 of Scotland’s population had been diagnosed with Hepatitis C. It is estimated that the number of people infected with Hepatitis C remaining undiagnosed exceeds those known by a factor of 1.5. The lowest rates of referral of Hepatitis C patients are in more remote, rural locations. Some geographical factors that might explain this could be: poorer Hepatitis C screening practices; poorer access to treatment centres; and a lower exposure of rural populations to the major risk factors. Recent work in France suggests that geographic access to medical care may affect the diagnosis of Hepatitis C.1 Unfortunately, that research did not control for the substantial difference in the number of Hepatitis C diagnoses expected between urban and rural areas, due to injecting drug use.

Aims & Methods: This paper tests the spatial inequality of Hepatitis C detection and the likely distribution of injecting drug use in Scotland. Negative binomial regression methods are used to examine the detection of approximately 20 000 Hepatitis C antibody positive tests and surrogate indicators of injecting drug use: (1) area deprivation; (2) methadone prescriptions.

Results: Positive relationships were found between Hepatitis C antibody positive tests, deprivation, and methadone prescriptions in increasingly urban areas.

Conclusion: Hepatitis C has been detected throughout Scotland, but is not evenly spatially distributed. People diagnosed with Hepatitis C are likely to live in urban areas characterised by high levels of deprivation and high numbers of methadone prescriptions. This information will be used in a follow-up study, building on and increasing the sophistication of previous research, which questions whether geographic access to healthcare influences the detection of Hepatitis C in Scotland.