Trends in hepatitis C-related mortality in Switzerland

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In order to accurately assess the burden of hepatitis C (HCV) and develop effective interventions, we must understand the magnitude and trends of mortality related to the disease. In the United States, HCV-related mortality is continuously increasing. We have no comparable data for Switzerland and other European countries, although a modelling study predicted a similar increase. We analysed time trends (1 January 1995-31 December 2014) in HCV-specific mortality rates in the Swiss general population using the death registry of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO). We compared HCV-related mortality to HIV-related and hepatitis B (HBV)-related mortality. To determine potential under-reporting in HCV-related mortality, we probabilistically linked the SFSO data to persons who died in the Swiss Hepatitis C Cohort Study (SCCS). SFSO data showed that HCV-related mortality more than doubled between 1995 and 2003, but has since stabilized at ~2.5/100 000 person-years. Since 2000, HCV-related mortality has been higher than HIV-related mortality and was about fivefold higher in 2014. HBV-related mortality remained low at ~0.5/100 000 person-years. Of 4556 persons in the SCCS, 421 have died and 86.2% could be linked to the death registry. According to the SCCS, 133 deaths were HCV-related. HCV was not mentioned on the SFSO death certificate of 45% of these (n = 60/133). In conclusion, HCV-related mortality remained constant, possibly because quality of care was high, or because of under-reporting or because mortality has not yet increased. However, HCV-related mortality is now much higher than HIV- and HBV-related mortality, and under-reporting was common.