

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination Names Professor John Dillon as 2021 Elimination Champion

– Dr. Dillon of NHS Tayside and the University of Dundee successfully eliminated hepatitis C in the Tayside Region of Scotland –

Atlanta, GA., July 23, 2021 – In honor of World Hepatitis Day, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination is pleased to announce Professor John Dillon was selected as a 2021 Elimination Champion for his contributions to advancing hepatitis elimination in Scotland and ensuring those lessons are shared with the world.

Under Dr. Dillon’s leadership, a clinical team from the National Health Service (NHS) Tayside partnered with a research team from the University of Dundee to design a regional hepatitis C prevention, testing, and treatment program that was centered on meeting people where they are, particularly people who inject drugs who often face a history of stigma and poor access to care. Dr. Dillon’s work began with running a needle exchange program but soon evolved to provide HCV testing and treatment services through many existing services, including pharmacies delivering opioid substitution therapy, prisons, and drug treatment centers. Through it all, Dr. Dillon pushed to simplify the testing and treatment pathway by removing barriers to patients, such as making the setting of care inviting and welcoming, co-locating testing and treatment with other services, and reducing the number of visits.

One of the simplified pathways introduced by Dr. Dillon is described in the [SuperDOT-C study](#). In this study, community pharmacists used dried blood spot testing to screen people who engaged in an opioid substitution therapy program. The pharmacists diagnosed their hepatitis C infection, assessed them for treatment, and then ultimately delivered the course of direct-acting antiviral drugs (DAAs). In this pathway, all care was delivered from the pharmacy and the pharmacy team was integrated into the multi-disciplinary team taking care of the patient’s holistic needs. This study was proposed as one of the six most influential papers in the topic area for 2020 by [Nature Reviews](#).

To date, the program in Tayside has treated almost 2,000 people living with hepatitis C, more than 90% of the estimated number of people living with HCV. This reduction in prevalence met both the WHO and Scottish Government targets for HCV elimination ahead of schedule.

Dr. Dillon reflects, “Each step you lose people. People are too frightened, they can’t afford the bus fare, they have other commitments or can’t afford to be away from somewhere for the time. So you really need to make the steps smaller and simpler. ... And as that starts to be successful, we started to lift our eyes and think about how we can make this a place where there is no longer hepatitis C. Where it was just something that was a historical footnote in medical textbooks. That's a world I wanted to see and that's what drove my team and I to think about the ways we could do that.”

In addition to his research and clinical work, Dr. Dillon has chaired the Testing, Treatment, and Care Working Group of phase one of the HCV Action Plan for Scotland and has twice chaired the development groups of the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) for the Management of Hepatitis C and the UK consensus guidelines for HCV. He is a member of the Scottish Government’s Ministerial Advisory Board for Sexual Health and Blood-Borne Viruses.

In all, six Elimination Champions were selected across the world. The other chosen champions included:

- Dr. Mohammad Ali, Bangladesh
- Mr. Arafat Bwambale, Uganda
- Rachel Gonzalez and Dr. Angela Park, United States
- Dr. Gamal Shiha, Egypt
- Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas, Mexico

The Elimination Champion initiative was launched in 2019 and aims to recognize the remarkable contributions of individuals to improved political commitment, policies, and programs that expand access to interventions and accelerate progress toward hepatitis elimination, particularly in areas with limited resources.

“The Coalition salutes the Hepatitis Elimination Champions from six countries bound by a shared commitment to eliminating hepatitis as a health threat for their patients and communities. These Champions are committed to achieving health equity, the ultimate goal of hepatitis elimination, by fighting hepatitis-related stigma, advocating for government action and expanding access to hepatitis testing and treatment through capacity building and developing simplified models of care. Because of their actions and the example they set for others, the world is that much closer to the goals for eliminating hepatitis. Congratulations and thank you,” says Dr. John Ward, Director of the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination.

The Elimination Champion 2021 nominations were opened from March 29th to May 24th, 2021. In all, 17 nominations were received from 15 countries. A panel of judges representing previous Elimination Champions, elimination program managers, the major liver disease professional associations, civil society, and donors assessed the nominations. Champions will receive awards by mail, and their profiles will be added to <https://www.globalhep.org/champions>.

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is commemorated each year on 28 July to enhance awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes a range of health problems, including liver cancer. There are five main strains of the hepatitis virus – A, B, C, D, and E. Together, hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) are the most common, with 354 million people living with HBV or HCV globally and more than 1.3 million lives lost each year. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, viral hepatitis continues to claim thousands of lives every day. See more at <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hepatitis-day/2021>

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

With the availability of reliable tests, highly protective hepatitis B vaccines, effective HBV medications, and curative HCV therapies in hand, in 2016, the WHO set targets for HBV and HCV elimination by 2030. The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (CGHE) was launched in July 2019 to accelerate progress toward these goals. Modeled after other disease elimination initiatives managed by the Task Force for Global Health, CGHE aims to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational hepatitis elimination programs through advocacy, technical assistance, knowledge generation, and dissemination among partners united in a community of practice. Find out more at www.globalhep.org.

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