Treatment for Depression Increases Hep C Adherence

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Antidepressants can significantly boost adherence rates in people living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) being treated with interferon, a drug known to cause depression, according to a study presented at the International Conference on Viral Hepatitis 2011.

For the study, experts at Medco Health Solutions, a U.S.-based pharmacy benefit manager, examined prescription files of 3,607 patients who had recently started taking interferon plus another drug, ribavirin, for the treatment of HCV. Approximately 1,650 of these patients were also being treated for depression.

Those whose prescription records indicated that they had HCV meds available for use at least 80 percent of the time were considered to be adhering to their drug regimens.

The Medco team found that while about 60 percent of all patients in the study adhered to their treatment regimen, this increased to 68.5 percent among patients also taking antidepressants. This increased further, to 77.3 percent, among patients who were being treated for both hepatitis C and HIV.

The duration of HCV therapy-either 24 o 48 weeks-and likelihood of being cured of the infection depends on a number of factors, including whether or not HCV viral load becomes undetectable during the first three months of treatment. While the virus's genotype and a person's genetic makeup play roles in the effectiveness of treatment, so does a person's ability to take his or her prescribed medications exactly as prescribed.

"Depression, whether interferon-induced or a separate co-morbid condition, can sabotage efforts to effectively treat Hepatitis C," said study author David Muzina, MD, of the Medco Neuroscience Therapeutic Resource Center. "All health care professionals, including pharmacists, need to know how to detect depression and work together to support safe, effective and affordable treatments."

Click here to read more about treatment for hepatitis C.

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