Merck and Roche to Collaborate on Hep C Treatment

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Pharmaceutical companies Merck and Roche have formed a non-exclusive agreement to cooperate on hepatitis C treatment options, Seeking Alpha reports.

Roche plans to help publicize Merck's new hep C drug, Victrelis (boceprevir), among U.S. physicians as part of combination therapy with pegylated interferon and ribavirin. In addition, the two companies will team to investigate new combination therapies.

Both Victrelis and Vertex Pharmaceuticals' new hep C drug Incivek (telaprevir) have demonstrated great promise in triple combination therapy. Currently, a two-drug combo of pegylated interferon and ribavirin, which is the traditional therapy for hep C, has only a 35 to 40 percent cure rate compared with Victrelis's cure rate of 66 percent. In addition, clinical trials of Incivek-expected to receive FDA approval this month-have demonstrated a cure rate of 79 percent. Both are expected to cut treatment time from 48 weeks to 24.

"There has been some indication that a significant number of patients suffering from hepatitis C may be deferring treatment until the new therapies become available, potentially as early as mid-2011," declared the company's annual report.

But while the slow progression of hep C makes this approach feasible, it's essential to talk with your doctor before making critical decisions regarding treatment.

To read the Seeking Alpha article, click here.

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