Medical Panel Slams Gilead for Sky-High Price of Sovaldi

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A panel of medical experts in California has lambasted Gilead Sciences for its exorbitant pricing of Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), the company's new hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment. The panel has asserted that only those with the most severe liver damage should undergo treatment with the drug, The Associated Press reports.

The California Technology Assessment Forum assembled representatives from state universities and hospitals for a meeting to assess the effectiveness of the two newly approved hep C drugs, Sovaldi as well as Janssen's Olysio (simeprevir), in relation to the cost of treatment. Sovaldi has a price tag of $84,000 for 12 weeks of therapy, a figure that doubles for those who require 24 weeks of treatment. Meanwhile, Olysio runs up a $66,000 bill for 12 weeks. Total hep C treatment costs must also factor in the price of ribavirin and, if necessary, interferon.

The panel's current findings are a precursor to a full report due in April.

Ahead of meeting, the forum estimated that supplanting older hep C therapies with Sovaldi would yield an extra $18 billion to $29 billion annual expenditure for both government and private insurers.

Gilead has stated that Sovaldi will save money in the long run by reducing the future costs of liver failure and transplant complications, but the panel of experts disagreed. They projected that in 20 years' time, such savings would only defray two-thirds of the cost of Sovaldi treatment.

The panel voted that Sovaldi and Olysio are superior to the older hep C treatments Incivek (telaprevir) and Victrelis (boceprevir). However, the majority of the panelists voted that the new drugs represent a "low value." Consequently, they asserted that only those with severe complications from hepatitis should be treated with Sovaldi and Olysio.

To read the AP story, click here.

To read a New York Times editorial on Sovaldi's high cost, click here.

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