World Health Organization Throws Weight Behind Hep C Treatments

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has added the new hepatitis C virus (HCV) medications to its Model List of Essential Medicines. The move represents WHO's commitment to encouraging access to hep C drugs worldwide. Governments and institutions often consult the WHO reference for guidance on their own lists of essential medications.

"When new effective medicines emerge to safely treat serious and widespread diseases, it is vital to ensure that everyone who needs them can obtain them," WHO director-general Margaret Chan, MD, said in a press release. "Placing them on the WHO Essential Medicines List is a first step in that direction."

Worldwide, an estimated 150 million people have hep C. About a half a million of them die from complications resulting from the virus each year.

Included in the list are Gilead Sciences' Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) and Harvoni (ledipasvir/sofosbuvir), Janssen's Olysio (simeprevir), Bristol-Myers Squibb's daclatasvir, and the two components of AbbVie's Viekira Pak (ombitasvir/paritaprevir/ritonavir; dasabuvir), as well as interferon and ribavirin.

WHO officials also expressed concern about the high price of these medications.

"Treatments for hepatitis C are evolving rapidly, with several new, highly effective and safe medicines on the market and many in the development pipeline," Marie-Paule Kieny, PhD, WHO assistant director-general for health systems and innovation, said in the same press release. "While some efforts have been made to reduce their price for low-income countries, without uniform strategies to make these medicines more affordable globally the potential for public health gains will be reduced considerably."

To read the WHO press release on hep C drugs, click here.

To read the Reuters article, click here.

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