WHO Issues Hep C Screening, Care and Treatment Guidelines

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The World Health Organization has issued its first guidelines for the screening, care and treatment of hepatitis C virus (HCV). WHO will coordinate with countries in order to put the guidelines into practice, giving particular attention toward making treatment affordable and accessible. The guidelines were issued at the 49th annual meeting of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) in London.

“The WHO recommendations are based on a thorough review of the best and latest scientific evidence,” Stefan Wiktor, MD, who leads WHO’s Global Hepatitis Programme, said in a release. “The new guidance aims to help countries to improve treatment and care for hepatitis and thereby reduce deaths from liver cancer and cirrhosis.”

WHO recommends those at high risk undergo hep C screening. Steps should be taken to mitigate liver damage by assessing those with hep C for their use of alcohol and providing substance use counseling for those who need it. WHO recommends prevention measures such as tackling the spread of the virus in health care settings and through injection drug use.

On the treatment front, WHO recommends that, in areas where access to treatment is limited, those with advanced fibrosis or cirrhosis receive priority. WHO recommends Olysio (simeprevir) plus pegylated interferon and ribavirin for those with hep C genotype 1b and for those with genotype 1a who do not have the Q80K polymorphism. Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) and ribavirin treatment, given with or without pegylated interferon based on genotype, is recommended for those with genotypes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

“Hepatitis C treatment is currently unaffordable to most patients in need. The challenge now is to ensure that everyone who needs these drugs can access them,” said Peter Beyer, senior advisor for the essential medicines and health products department at WHO. “Experience has shown that a multi-pronged strategy is required to improve access to treatment, including creating demand for treatment. The development of WHO guidelines is a key step in this process.”

To read the WHO press release, click here.

To download the guidelines, click here.

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