amfAR Report Examines Hepatitis C Drug Pricing Controversy

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A new report from amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, criticizes the high cost of new hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatments, claiming that even with recent discounts to low- and middle-income countries, the pharmaceutical industry has effectively limited global access to the drugs, which will cause unnecessary liver disease deaths around the world, according to an amfAR press release.

“Hepatitis C and Drug Pricing: The Need for a Better Balance” urges countries to make several structural changes to the way pricing incentives are offered to pharma companies, so that they can no longer charge “exorbitant” prices for new products based on their efficacy.

Among the hep C drugs highlighted in the issue brief is Gilead Science’s Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), which in the United States costs $1,000 a pill or $84,000 for a standard 12-week course of treatment. Sovaldi and its combo-drug counterpart, Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir), boast some of the highest hep C cure rates in history.

Gilead recently licensed seven Indian pharmaceutical companies to produce cheaper generic versions of Sovaldi for 91 developing countries. However, the amfAR report has found that even in the world’s wealthiest countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany, the cost of the new drug has already become difficult to bear.

The paper also notes that there are 51 middle-income countries that were not offered discounts on Sovaldi and will likely remain unable to access it for years to come.

As many as 185 million people are living with hep C worldwide, including 3 million Americans. Most HCV-positive people in the United States are uninsured, underinsured or incarcerated. Up to 350,000 people around the world die every year due to HCV-related complications.

To read the amfAR report, click here.

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