Could a Cancer Drug Cure Hepatitis B?

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A cancer drug has shown promise as a potential cure for hepatitis B virus (HBV). Publishing their findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Australian researchers studied the effects of a combination treatment on hep B-infected liver cells, using the antiviral drug entecavir and the anticancer drug birinapant.

The treatment was 100 percent effective at eliminating the virus, and left normal cells unharmed. It apparently worked by targeting the cell signaling channels that hep B uses to keep liver cells alive.

“Normally, liver cells would respond to infection by switching on a signal that tells the cell to destroy itself ‘for the greater good’, preventing further infection,” Marc Pellegrini, PhD, an infectious disease researcher at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne and the study’s lead author, said in a press release. “However our research showed that the virus commandeers the liver cells’ internal communications, telling the cells to ignore the infection and stay alive. Birinapant flips the cell survival ‘switch’ used by the virus, causing the infected cell to die.”

Phase I/IIa human trials of the treatment began in 2014.

To read the press release, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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