China Rejects Patent for Hep C Drug Sovaldi

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Last week, China officially rejected a patent application for Gilead Sciences' $1,000-per-pill hepatitis C virus (HCV) drug, Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), a decision advocates say could lead the way for more countries to nix protections over the expensive liver disease treatment, Tech Times reports.

Treatment access activists at Initiative for Medicines, Access and Knowledge (I-MAK) pushed for the rejection, arguing once again that Sovaldi's formulation is not truly innovative.

Earlier this year, I-MAK argued for a similar patent rejection in India, ultimately laying the groundwork for pharmaceutical companies there to make cheaper, generic versions of Sovaldi. As of now, China's patent rejection does not allow for generic production of the drug.

Sovaldi has drawn a lot of controversy since its December 2013 release. The treatment boasts over 90 percent cure rates, but it costs the equivalent of $84,000 for a standard 12-week course of treatment.

In the fall of 2014, Gilead offered substantial discounts for Sovaldi to 91 developing countries. However, many middle-income nations—including China, Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine—were not offered a price break.

I-MAK reps have filed challenges to patent applications of Sovaldi in all of those countries. Overall, the group estimates that these middle-income nations make up nearly 40 million of the 150 million hepatitis C sufferers worldwide.

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