The New York Times Examines Egypt's Hepatitis C 'Experiment'

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Over the last year, a big push to cure hepatitis C virus (HCV) in Egypt has positioned the country's plan as a potential public health blueprint for providing next-generation cures to the poor, according to an in-depth analysis by The New York Times.

The Times reports that Egypt stands at the apex of a new approach by several international pharmaceutical companies to sell cutting-edge medicines at a fraction of their usual price in the developing world. The aim is to ensure widespread global access to life-saving treatments, while still maintaining sizeable profits and control over the drugs in wealthier nations.

Last year, facing pressure over the high cost of its new HCV therapies, Gilead Sciences agreed to sell its hep C cure Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) for about $10 a pill to the Egyptian government, or 1 percent of the price the drug is sold at in the United States. The deal has since been emulated by other drug companies, and Egypt is now importing AbbVie's Viekira Pak (ombitasvir/paritaprevir/ritonavir; dasabuvir) and Bristol-Myers Squibb's Daklinza (daclatasvir) at similarly low costs. Egypt has also been a major beneficiary of new international licensing deals that are allowing countries like India and Bangladesh to make generic versions of hep C treatments.

So far, the plan seems to be working. Last year, Egypt treated 125,000 people with the cheaper sofosbuvir options through a no-cost government program. Now, the nation's goal is to treat 300,000 people with hepatitis annually, starting in 2016, and to drive the national HCV rate below 2 percent by 2025.

Global health authorities estimate that at least 10 percent of Egyptians, or nearly 9 million people, have chronic HCV; the country has the highest hep C prevalence in the world.

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