Emory Scientists Awarded $1.2 Million for Research on Hepatitis C Elimination

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The National Science Foundation (NSF) recently awarded a research team at Emory University a four-year $1.2 million grant designed to study the potential of hepatitis C virus (HCV) elimination in the United States, Emory News Center reports.

The funding will be directed to an interdisciplinary team of scientists at the university consisting of Anne Spaulding, MD, an infectious disease doctor in the department of medicine at Emory School of Medicine and a national cohort of colleagues from Harvard Medical School, the Georgia Institute of Technology, the George Family Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital. The team will use operations research to answer policy-related questions that could lead to hepatitis C elimination across the country.

For instance, scientists will look into how state Medicaid programs could expand HCV screening and treatment under current budget constraints, what kind of hepatitis C testing policies should be implemented for the general population and how investments in high-risk groups such as incarcerated people could help reduce the spread of the virus. Researchers will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), state and county health departments, and prison policymakers to share their findings and work toward implementation.

Ultimately, researchers say the project aims to help the country substantially reduce the rate and scope of the country's hepatitis C epidemic in a way that meshes with national aims to eliminate the virus by 2030.

Every year, the NSF awards billions of dollars to American colleges and universities for research intended "to promote the progress of science, to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; to secure the national defense…" in the United States. The fact that a portion of this year's research money is going toward hepatitis elimination is a promising sign that federal authorities are beginning to take the epidemic seriously.

Currently, between 2 and 4 million people in the United States are estimated to be living with hepatitis C. The viral liver disease is also now causing more deaths in this country than 60 other infectious diseases combined, including HIV and tuberculosis.

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