ER Visits, Hospital Stays Drop for People Successfully Treated for Hepatitis C

Antiviral therapy reduced the need for hospitalization and emergency treatment for liver-related and other conditions.

March 30, 2022 By Sukanya Charuchandra

People with hepatitis C who were treated with direct-acting antivirals were less likely to need emergency medical care and hospitalization, according to study results published in Clinical Infectious Diseases.

It is estimated that some 2.4 million people in the United States are living with hepatitis C virus (HCV). Over time, chronic HCV infection can lead to serious complications, including cirrhosis, liver cancer and the need for a liver transplant. Direct-acting antiviral therapy can cure more than 90% of treated individuals, but less is known about long-term outcomes.

Stuart Gordon, MD, of Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, and colleagues analyzed rates of emergency department visits and hospital admissions for people who achieved a sustained virological response (SVR), or an undetectable viral load 12 weeks after completing antiviral therapy, which is considered a cure.

Among 3,049 matched pairs, people who achieved SVR were less likely to visit the emergency room for liver-related issues than those who were not successfully treated. Hospitalization rates for all-cause and liver-related conditions were lower, as was the duration of hospital stays.

“The findings of our study show that curing hepatitis C not only gets rid of the virus, it also improves the overall health of patients,” Stuart Gordon, said in a press release. “This is consistent with our earlier studies that showed effective treatment of hepatitis C also reduces the risk of patients developing other health conditions, like diabetes, kidney disease, stroke and heart attacks.”

While cost savings from reduced hospital visits was not assessed, the researchers speculate that such savings could be considerable. “There are tangible downstream benefits from these antiviral treatments,” said Gordon. “If you’re cured of the virus, your overall health will get better and you’re less likely to be hospitalized for some other health condition.”

Click here to read the study abstract in Clinical Infectious Diseases.

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