France to Provide Universal Hepatitis C Treatment by Fall 2016

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After years of limitations, France is now offering immediate hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment to every HCV-positive person diagnosed with at least stage 2 liver fibrosis in the country. France also plans to provide universal access to the lifesaving cures by September 2016, according to a recent announcement by French health minister Marisol Touraine, aidsmap reports.

Since new direct-acting antivirals for HCV came out in late 2013, French health authorities have been authorizing treatment only for people with advanced liver damage or cirrhosis, what's considered to be a stage F3 or F4 fibrosis score. So far, approximately 30,000 people in France have received treatment with the interferon-free combinations. However, health authorities say hundreds of thousands more HCV-positive people still don't have access to the drugs.

Under the new rules, next-generation HCV cures will also be made available immediately to anyone with hepatitis C waiting for a liver transplant, or those experiencing a recurrence of HCV after a transplant. Immediate access will also be given to groups considered to be at high risk of transmitting the disease, such as prisoners, pregnant women and people who inject drugs.

French health officials say they are now re-negotiating HCV drug prices with U.S. pharmaceutical companies to ensure the financial viability of universal access, but the announcement comes ahead of any firm agreement on price reduction. Currently, the cost of hepatitis C treatment is around 41,000 euros per patient, and France's budget for HCV treatment is capped at 700 million euros.

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