France to Tax Hepatitis C Drug Makers to Encourage Price Cuts

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France will begin taxing pharmaceutical companies that produce expensive new drugs to treat the hepatitis C virus (HCV), Reuters reports. The tax will help avoid financially overwhelming the country's state-run health care system.

The move is intended to both expand patient access to new hep C drugs and to put pressure on drug makers like Gilead Sciences to cut their prices for the country.

In France, Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), Gilead's next-generation HCV cure, currently costs about €56,000 ($70,000) per patient for a standard 12-week course of treatment. In the United States, that same treatment costs about $84,000.

According to France's health minister, Marisol Touraine, the government would only selectively tax companies if their total cost to the state's system exceeded €450 million in 2014. She also noted that the tax cap would be raised to €700 million in 2015.

An estimated 200,000 people in France are HCV positive. Treating them could run the country's health care system as much as €1 billion at current costs. Gilead obtained approval for Sovaldi in Europe this past January, but France is still in the process of negotiating its official price for the drug with the company.

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