German Scientist Awarded Prize for Hepatitis D Treatment

Stephan Urban, PhD, developed a drug that blocks hepatitis B and D from entering liver cells.

November 21, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

German scientist and distinguished professor and virologist Stephan Urban, PhD, was awarded the 2023 Baruch S. Blumberg Prize by the Hepatitis B Foundation for inventing a new first-in-class treatment for hepatitis D.

Hepatitis D, or delta, is a defective virus that can only replicate in the presence of hepatitis B virus (HBV). The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 5% of people with hepatitis B also have hepatitis D. Coinfection with both viruses can result in more severe liver disease and a higher risk for liver cancer.

To combat this, Urban and his team at Heidelberg University Hospital developed the drug bulevirtide, which block hepatitis B from entering liver cells and thereby prevents hepatitis D replication. Bulevirtide was approved in Europe in 2020, where it is marketed under the brand name Hepcludex, but the Food and Drug Administration recently delayed approval in the United States.

“Dr. Urban’s innovative research has helped us understand key components of hepatitis B and D virology, and he is a pioneer in the development of new therapeutics for hepatitis B and D,” Hepatitis B Foundation president Chari A. Cohen, DrPH, MPH, said in a Hepatitis B Foundation news release. “The hepatitis B and D communities owe him a debt of gratitude.”

The cofounder of the global nonprofit the Hepatitis B Foundation, virologist Timothy Block, PhD, said, “Urban is one of the world’s most innovative and creative scientists, taking an idea for a drug from concept all the way to practice, where it’s now being used to treat people. Honoring this kind of accomplishment is exactly what we intended for the Blumberg Prize.”

Urban will receive the Blumberg Prize at the 2023 Hepatitis B Foundation Gala on March 10.

To learn more about hepatitis D, click #hepatitis D. There, you’ll find headlines such as “Hepatitis D Facts and Information” and “Hepatitis D Tied to Higher Health Care Costs in Those With Hep B.”

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