Hepatitis C Could Become Rare in the U.S. By 2036

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Thanks to new, highly effective treatments and increased screening, hepatitis C virus (HCV) could become a rare disease in 22 years, according to a new modeling study, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports. Publishing their findings in the Annals of Internal Medicine, researchers created a mathematical model to predict how direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment and screening for the virus will affect the future prevalence of the disease as well as liver-related health problems.

The model predicted that the one-time hep C screen that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommend for baby boomers will identify 487,000 new cases of the virus over the next decade. A one-time universal screen, on the other hand, would identify 933,700 cases of hep C.

With the one-time test for baby boomers and the availability of the new DAAs, hep C prevalence is estimated to plummet to just one in 1,500 people in the United States by 2036. This would prevent an estimated 124,200 cases of decompensated cirrhosis, 78,800 cases of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC, the most common form of liver cancer), 126,500 liver-related deaths and 9,800 liver transplants by 2050.

Universal screening could lower hep C prevalence to the same level in just 12 years, while preventing 96,300 cases of HCC, 161,500 liver-related deaths and 13,900 liver transplants.

“If we can improve access to treatment and incorporate more aggressive screening guidelines, we can reduce the number of chronic HCV cases, prevent more cases of liver cancer and reduce liver-related deaths,” Jagpreet Chhatwal, PhD, assistant professor of health services research at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and corresponding author on the study, said in a release.

“Making hepatitis C a rare disease would be a tremendous, lifesaving accomplishment,” the study’s lead author, Mina Kabiri, a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, said in the same release. “However, to do this, we will need improved access to care and increased treatment capacity, primarily in the form of primary care physicians who can manage the care of infected people identified through increased screening.”

To read the Post-Gazette story, click here.

To read the press release, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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