Hep C Treatment Is Heart Healthy

Direct-acting antivirals lower the risk of cardiovascular disease to a greater extent than interferon-based regimens.

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People with hepatitis C virus (HCV) have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) if they receive treatment for the virus, in particular if they take direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) rather than the older, now largely obsolete class of interferon-based regimens.

Researchers reviewed Veterans Affairs data and identified 242,700 vets with hep C. Among them, 4,440 were treated with interferon and ribavirin while 12,670 received DAA regimens. The study authors drew upon the wider cohort of people with HCV to create an untreated control group, matching the treated individuals according to age, race, sex and other baseline characteristics.

No one in the overall cohort used for the study's analysis had been diagnosed with a CVD health event upon entry into the electronic database.

A total of 1,240 (7.2 percent) of those in the treated group were subsequently diagnosed with a CVD health event, as were 2,360 (13.8 percent) of those in the control group. This translated to a diagnosis rate per 1,000 cumulative years of follow-up of about 20 diagnoses in the treated group and 31 diagnoses in the control group.

Compared with not receiving treatment, being treated with interferon plus ribavirin was associated with a 22 percent reduction in the CVD health event diagnosis rate, while being treated with DAAs was linked to a 43 percent reduction. The diagnosis rates per 1,000 cumulative years of follow-up were about 24, 16 and 30 diagnoses in the interferon group, DAA group and control group, respectively.

The study authors wrote that their findings demonstrate "clear evidence of a benefit of successful treatment" of hep C. They continued: "With cure rates of greater than 90 percent with DAAs and a clear survival benefit with treatment, more HCV-infected persons will live longer. Reducing CVD risk will be increasingly important in these patients."
