Retreatment With Interferon Can Hasten Death in Hepatitis C Patients

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For people with hepatitis C and chronic liver disease, retreatment with interferon monotherapy is unlikely to improve their condition and may actually increase their risk of dying. The findings have implications for treatment with combination therapy as well. Publishing the findings of their systematic scientific literature review in The Cochrane Library, which is published by Wiley, researchers analyzed two large trials, including 1,676 patients with hepatitis C virus (HCV) who were treated with interferon monotherapy after a previous treatment had failed.

The investigators found that the risk of death was 9.4 percent following interferon retreatment, compared with 6.7 percent for placebo or no treatment. Even when interferon treatment did lead to a sustained virologic response (SVR, considered a cure) there was no associated reduction in risk of death, leading the researchers to speculate that an SVR may not suffice as an indication of a successful treatment in the context of this treatment scenario.

“It was troubling to see that in those trials providing the most reliable estimates of treatment effects, interferon seemed to increase the risk of death,” lead researcher Ronald Koretz of Granada Hills in California said in a release. “Based on these results, interferon monotherapy cannot be recommended for chronic hepatitis C patients who have already failed one course of treatment and are being retreated. Furthermore, patients who are receiving interferon as part of a combination therapy should be informed about this potential adverse effect.”

To read the Wiley release on the study, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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