Is NASH the Next Hepatitis C?

July 22, 2014

Hepatitis experts around the world are now saying that nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, a.k.a. NASH, could be the next big global health epidemic in liver disease. According to a new research report from a Deutsche Bank analyst, an advanced version of the “silent” disorder affects an estimated 6.5 million adults in the United States and Europe and has the potential to garner up to $40 billion in the global pharmaceutical drug market by 2025, CNBC News reports.

Liver doctors say NASH looks very similar to alcoholic liver disease but occurs in people who do not drink too much alcohol. Instead, contributing factors include obesity and diabetes, which are both on the rise globally. The liver disease is like the hepatitis C virus (HCV), because it rarely shows noticeable symptoms but can lead to permanent liver scarring and fibrosis if left untreated. NASH is currently the third most common reason for liver transplants in the United States, with 2 to 5 percent of Americans currently affected.

NASH sparked the attention of Wall Street in January 2014, when a study of a new drug for the disease, being developed by the biotech company Intercept, was stopped early for positive results. As a result, the little-known company’s stock nearly tripled. Final results from the trial are expected to be announced this November at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD).

The new potential NASH drug market competition also includes French biotech company Genfit and hep C heavyweight Gilead Sciences, among others. As of now, no therapies have been approved for treating the liver disease.

To read the full CNBC report, click here.

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