Janssen Set to Discontinue Its Hepatitis C Drug Development

September 12, 2017

Janssen Sciences Ireland UC, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, has announced that it will discontinue further development of its hepatitis C virus (HCV) research. The research unit says the decision is strategic, citing a crowded treatment market in the hep C arena, Reuters reports.

This halts all future progress on Janssen's investigational hepatitis C treatment JNJ-4178, a combination of three direct-acting antivirals as a potential new cure for the virus. Ongoing Phase II studies with the drug (which would have combined simeprevir, odalasvir and the investigational treatment AL-335) will be completed as planned, with no additional development after that, the drugmaker announced last week.

The decision brings the drug company's history with HCV treatment to a sudden end. Over the years, Janssen helped co-develop telaprevir, a first-of-its-kind protease inhibitor used in some of the first combination therapies for hepatitis C. The company also helped launch the second-generation protease inhibitor Olysio (simeprevir), which is approved to treat HCV in several countries.

Meanwhile, Medivir, which co-developed Olysio with Janssen, says it will continue to distribute and license the hepatitis C drug as a single agent. Janssen says its hepatitis research and development efforts moving forward will focus on chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) treatment.

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