Louisiana Proposes Bold Plan to Expand Access to Hep C Treatment

The idea is being referred to as a “subscription-based” model.

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After several months of considering new ideas for expanding access to hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, Louisiana lawmakers say they have landed on something that might make next-generation cures available to most patients by 2019, The Advocate reports.

State Health Secretary Rebekah Gee, MD, recently told reporters in an interview that the idea—which is being referred to as a “subscription-based” model for treatment—was likely to win support from both federal officials and pharmaceutical companies. Under the proposal, Louisiana would take the money it currently spends on hepatitis C treatment in its state Medicaid and prison system and find an HCV drugmaker willing to get paid that price for unlimited access to the medication for a period of three to five years.

Gee also said some of the largest pharmaceutical manufacturers in the United States have expressed interest in the potential deal. In addition, the National Governor’s Association, a bipartisan organization of state leaders identified the so-called subscription-based model as one of its key recommendations for other states looking to expand access to treatment.

The Louisiana Department of Health is currently seeking feedback on the program from the public. After that, it will select a drugmaker through a formal bidding process. Finally the plan would also require approval from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, which have been urging states to be more innovative with their health care delivery methods.

“We’re really optimistic that we might be the first state in the nation to get close to curing hep C,” said Gee, when asked about the future of the negotiations. It is estimated that nearly 35,000 people in Louisiana’s Medicaid program are living with hepatitis C. As of last year, just 384 patients were treated.

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