Merck Continues to Target Military Veterans With Its Hepatitis C Outreach

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In the United States, veterans are nearly three times more likely to be living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) than the general population. However, a new partnership between U.S. pharmaceutical giant Merck & Co. and the American Liver Foundation is seeking to change that — and will soon be offering educational events for former service members across the country to help narrow that gap, FiercePharma reports.

Merck, which makes the hepatitis C treatment Zepatier (elbasvir/grazoprevir) will join the national advocacy group at upcoming events in Boston, Philadelphia, Phoenix and San Diego. The meet-ups will aim to educate local veterans about their HCV risk, dispense tips and resources for those living with the virus, and provide information about testing and treatment for those who don't yet know their status.

The company's veteran-specific awareness push should come as no surprise to those familiar with the current politics of the hepatitis C treatment market. In May of last year, Merck snapped up a major market share at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs by offering the agency steeper-than-expected discounts on Zepatier — a move that helped set them apart from competitors like Gilead Sciences and AbbVie.

Since then, Zepatier has earned more than $555 million in sales for Merck in 2016, and $895 million in the first six months of 2017. The company says it made the decision to focus its efforts on veterans specifically based on a review of Phase II efficacy data and an analytical review of the evolving marketplace around HCV treatment.

Meanwhile, Merck's biggest competitor, Gilead Sciences, continues to focus the majority of its educational efforts on the U.S. baby boomer population, while AbbVie appears to be homing in on pan-genotypic hepatitis C treatments.

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