NIH Grant May Help Bring Hepatitis C Testing to Poor Countries

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Daktari Diagnostics, an international manufacturer of health tech products, received a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to continue work on a new diagnostic system for the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The system would help bring testing for the deadly liver disease to resource-limited countries around the world, according to a press release from the company.

The NIH's Phase I Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant will fast-track Daktari's development of a testing tool that will be able to detect and quantify a person's hep C viral load from a finger prick in less than 30 minutes.

The new device will use the same point-of-care platform as the renowned Daktari CD4 System, a battery-powered, handheld instrument used to screen for HIV in Africa, Asia and other remote settings.

At least 175 million people are currently living with hepatitis C worldwide, and health experts say new, highly effective HCV treatments could make international eradication of the disease possible for the first time. But the cost of new drugs, which can run as high as $80,000 per treatment course, as well as the poor availability of HCV testing in certain areas, are major challenges to ending the global hep C epidemic.

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