How North Carolina Uses “Telementoring” to Help Fight Hepatitis C

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Could telemedicine be the next big thing in hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment? A new program launched this year by the University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Medicine, Duke University Medical Center and the N.C. Division of Public Health thinks so. The program is going online to train primary care providers across the state to prescribe and monitor next-generation cures, The Triangle Business Journal reports.

The program, called the Carolina Hepatitis Academic Mentorship Program (CHAMP), is being led by three volunteer hepatitis C specialists: Michael Fried, MD, professor of medicine and director of the UNC Liver Center; Andrew Muir, MD, professor of medicine and chief of the Duke Division of Gastroenterology; and Jama Darling, MD, assistant professor of medicine at the Division of GI and Hepatology at UNC.

Muir and Darling each host two webcasts per month on hepatitis C virus treatment and provide online mentoring sessions where primary care physicians and nurse practitioners can ask them for treatment suggestions, a second opinion on cases and help identifying patients in need of specialized care. According to program organizers, CHAMP is providing “telementoring” services to roughly 30 primary care physicians and nurse practitioners in North Carolina.

By empowering primary care providers (rather than just liver disease specialists) to dole out hepatitis C treatment, North Carolina’s initiative aims to vastly expand the number of people able to access a cure across the state. The program comes at a particularly crucial time in North Carolina’s fight against the HCV epidemic, with state health officials noting that hepatitis C rates have increased more than 400 percent across the state since 2009 (largely due to the ongoing U.S. opioid epidemic).

Although the partnership doesn’t expect to start seeing initial cure rate results for another three to four months, program leaders say they’re expecting the online mentorships to have a major impact on the long-term public health of North Carolina.

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