Rhode Island Medicaid Denied 65% of Hep C Treatment Requests in 2015

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Rhode Island's Medicaid program has rejected nearly 65 percent of patient requests for hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment so far in 2015, a move that, while saving the state millions of dollars, is keeping hundreds of sick patients from accessing a cure, Rhode Island Public Radio reports.

The research is clear: New hepatitis C treatments can achieve a cure in most patients within about 12 weeks. However, the drugs are so expensive—costing up to $1,000 per day or $84,000 for a full course of treatment—that health insurers across the United States have begun placing tight limits on who can access the meds.

In Rhode Island, Medicaid is currently restricting HCV drugs only to people who already have advanced liver damage. The state also requires patients to abstain from drugs and alcohol for at least six months.

Recent reports show that out of nearly 315 hep C treatment requests filed to the state-funded health program this year, Medicaid reps only pre-authorized 110 patients for a cure.

Rhode Island's restrictive practices go directly against qualifications set up by the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD), which recommends that hep C patients start treatment before they develop severe liver disease.

Chronic hepatitis C affects up to 4.7 million people across the United States; however, reports show that 42 states and the District of Columbia restrict access to treatment. For more information, click here.

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