Better Diagnostics in Development for Fatty Liver Diseases

Today’s current testing standard, a liver biopsy, is a painful and expensive procedure that also has limited accuracy.

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Pharmaceutical companies rushing to develop new treatments for fatty liver diseases are now creating a big demand among medical device manufacturers for better diagnostic tools to select patients and test the efficacy of new drugs, Fox News reports.

Fatty liver diseases, such as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), affect up to 30 percent of people in the United States. The diseases are strongly linked to the obesity and diabetes epidemics, and could potentially affect up to 50 percent of the U.S. population by 2030, according to data from the American Liver Foundation.

Testing protocol for conditions like NASH mainly involve a liver biopsy, which both doctors and patients lament is a painful and expensive procedure that also has limited accuracy.

That’s why several medical device manufacturers, such as KineMed, Raptor Pharmaceuticals and Perspectum Diagnostics, are now working on biopsy alternatives. Some of their new techniques involve MRI scans, blood tests and tools that can evaluate liver damage via exhaled breath.

Without treatment, people with NASH can develop advanced liver damage like fibrosis, cirrhosis and cancer. More than a dozen drug manufacturers, including Gilead Sciences and Intercept Pharmaceuticals, are working on cures for the disease.

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