Insurance Woes

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The benefits of screening for hep C are diminished in individuals who test positive and do not have health insurance. To come to this conclusion, researchers analyzed data on 38,000 people who were tested for hep C as a part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey between 2001 and 2010.

Participants in the study who received a positive test result were sent a letter informing them they had hep C, along with advice to seek a medical consultation. They were also given information about the transmission of hep C and the potential complications of living with the virus. Six months later, researchers contacted the participants to see what sort of action, if any, they had taken in response.

A total of 502 participants tested positive for hep C, with 205 of them participating in the six-month follow-up interview. Half of these individuals had not known they were HCV positive before undergoing the test. A total of 166 of those interviewed (81 percent) had sought further medical evaluation within six months of testing positive.

Researchers found that the only significant barrier to seeking further HCV-related care was a lack of health insurance. Uninsured people were 2.76 times less likely to seek further care than those who had health insurance.

“It will be up to physicians and patients to draw our lawmaker’s attention about barriers to accessing treatments that can prevent the downstream high-cost complications of HCV,” says Savita Srivastava, MD, spokesperson for the American Gastroenterological Association, from the University of Virginia and University Physicians Group.

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