Treating Hepatitis C Ups Quality of Life of Injection Drug Users, Who Are at Risk for Reinfection

May 18, 2016

Injection drug users (IDUs) who are cured of hepatitis C virus (HCV) experience an improvement in their quality of life but remain at risk of contracting the virus again, aidsmap reports. Presenting their findings at the 51st International Liver Congress in Barcelona, researchers from the Phase III C-EDGE CO-STAR study of Merck's Zepatier (grazoprevir/elbasvir) presented findings about how the treatment affected the quality of life of 301 treatment-naive IDUs with genotypes 1, 4 or 6.

The researchers also presented findings about reinfection rates among this cohort.

Initial results from the study were presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) in Boston in November 2015. The participants were randomly assigned to receive Zepatier or a placebo for 12 weeks, after which the study was unblinded and those on the placebo received Zepatier for another 12 weeks.

Ninety-two percent of the participants achieved a sustained virologic response 12 weeks after completing therapy (SVR12, considered a cure). The cure rate rose to 96 percent when the researchers excluded from their analysis those who dropped out of the study for non-treatment-related factors or who were reinfected with hep C.

The participants were given health-related quality of life surveys at the study's outset, at week four of treatment, at the end of treatment and at weeks four and 12 post-treatment.

Twelve weeks after treatment, the general health aspect of health-related quality of life had improved significantly in the Zepatier group compared with the placebo group.

The researchers identified six individuals who were probably reinfected with hep C. Five of those in the Zepatier group were reinfected by week 12 after completing treatment, while one person in the placebo group was reinfected by week 24 post-treatment. This translated to an estimated reinfection rate within the 24 weeks following treatment of 8.4 percent per year.

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