Treating Youth Living With Hep C

Doctors are finding ways to diagnose and treat this difficult-to-reach demographic.

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As access to hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment expands across the country, young people are still being left out when it comes to diagnosis and care, and doctors are trying to figure out how to better combat the crisis, MDMag reports.

According to a study presented at IDWeek 2018, from a pool of nearly 269,000 teenage and young-adult patients across 19 states, just 2.5 percent were tested for hep C. Among those with a history of drug use, just 8.9 percent were tested. Among those officially diagnosed with an opioid-use disorder, 35 percent were tested—despite the fact that Americans who use opioids are nearly nine times more likely to have HCV than the general population.

What's more, an additional study on hep C prevalence in young drug users ages 22 to 30 found that even when diagnosed, these patients face a number of barriers in accessing treatment, including, in some states, minimum liver damage requirements before medication may be given and stigmatization by health care providers.

So how can medical providers better target young people? A lot of experts are looking at a blueprint designed by Australia. That nation aims to eliminate HCV in the next 10 to 15 years by implementing a universal hep C screening policy—regardless of age—to help track down hard-to-reach cases and reduce stigma surrounding the disease.

Expanding access to new direct-acting antivirals with a fixed payment method that would ensure all Medicaid and uninsured patients have access to care when diagnosed would also help significantly.

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