Two Nations Make Progress in Eliminating Hepatitis C

Iceland and Georgia both have instigated aggressive testing and treatment initiatives.

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The nations of Iceland and Georgia have each instigated aggressive hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing and treatment programs that are bearing impressive fruit in the effort to eliminate the virus as a public health threat.

Findings from analyses of these two countries' hep C elimination efforts were presented at the 52nd International Liver Congress in Paris.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has partnered with Georgia to diagnose 90 percent of the nation's hep C population, treat 95 percent of those individuals and cure 95 percent of the treated group by 2020. Findings from the first two years of the program, which launched in April 2015, were presented at the conference in Paris.

An estimated 150,000 Georgians, or 5.4 percent of the national population, are living with hep C. By April 2017, 43,989 people in Georgia had been diagnosed with the virus, an estimated 29.3 percent of the national HCV population. A total of 33,673 people (76.5 percent of those diagnosed) had started treatment for the virus; of these, 24,273 (72 percent of those who have started treatment) have achieved a sustained virologic response 12 weeks after completing therapy (SVR12, considered a cure).

Iceland started its Treatment as Prevention for Hepatitis C (TraP HepC) program in January 2016, hoping to ultimately end the virus as a public health threat in the nation. The program prioritizes treating the virus in people who inject drugs (PWID), those with advanced liver disease and prisoners. Those who experience viral relapse or are reinfected following treatment are meant to receive prompt retreatment.

The analysis presented at the Paris conference looked at the prevalence of hep C among PWID who were admitted to the Society of Alcoholism and Other Addictions' Vogur Hospital, Iceland's largest addiction treatment center; more than 90 percent of the nation's PWID who receive addiction treatment do so there.

During the first 15 months of this program, 554 people with hep C were evaluated in the hospital's

PWID population; of these, 518 (93.5 percent) began treatment for the virus. A total of 473 (91.3 percent) of those individuals completed treatment, of whom 96 percent were cured.

Among the PWID population in the hospital as a whole, the prevalence of HCV dropped by 72 percent between 2015 and 2017, from 43 percent to 12 percent.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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