When Positive Hep C Tests Go Unconfirmed, Care Can Go Awry

August 13, 2014

In the event that individuals test positive for hepatitis C virus (HCV) but do not receive confirmation through genetic testing, they are subject to various cracks in the health care system and potentially unnecessary care. Publishing their findings in The American Journal of Managed Care, researchers designed a retrospective cohort study of 419 people who received a positive hep C antibody test (HCVab) at Veterans Affairs clinics between 1991 and 2010, but who did not receive the required ribonucleic acid (RNA) confirmation.

If someone tests positive for the HCVab, there is always the chance this is a false positive read, an uncertainty that the RNA test clears up.

The positive HCVab test results went unacknowledged by the providers of 31 percent of the study subjects. In 35 percent of the cases, clinicians added hep C to the patient's electronic medical records list of chronic medical conditions, which resulted in an increased likelihood that other providers would later mention the diagnosis in the records. A total of 143 of the individuals with unconfirmed hep C had providers who recommended clinical actions related to the infection within a year of the positive HCVab test result. Out of that group, 45 percent received hep C education and 42 percent had their liver enzymes monitored.

The researchers concluded that, with hep C testing rates likely to increase in the future, "health systems should ensure the HCV diagnostic process results in the delivery of an accurate and timely HCV diagnosis, to reduce the risk of harm to the patients."

To read a HepMag.com feature on false positive hep C test results, click here.

To read the study, click here.

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http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/unconfirmed-test-26036-1177996512