Universal Hep C Test-and-Treat Policy Would Be Cost Effective

Researchers modeled the differences between testing focused on baby boomers versus universal screening.

October 24, 2018 By Benjamin Ryan

Given how the opioid epidemic is contributing to the recent increase in transmissions of hepatitis C virus (HCV) among young peoplein the United States, researchers are calling for universal screening of the virus. Such a move would be cost effective, according to a new analysis.

Publishing their findings in Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology, researchers constructed a computer model to estimate the impact of a one-time universal hep C screening of U.S. adults, followed by treating all those who test positive. They compared this outcome with the current guidelines that recommend a one-time test for all baby boomers—those born between 1945 and 1965, who make up the bulk of HCV cases. Otherwise, guidelines currently advise testing non–baby boomers based on their hep C risk factors.

Cost-effectiveness analyses such as these look at an outcome known as quality-adjusted life-years (QALY), a measurement of years of life gained adjusted for compromises in quality of life. An intervention can contribute to a gain in QALY both by increasing life expectancy and improving quality of life.

Generally, if an intervention costs less than $50,000 to provide a population with one additional QALY, it is considered cost effective in the United States. Some analyses set this threshold as high as $100,000.

According to the computer model in this study, expanding from the current HCV screening policy to one based on universal screening would cost an additional $11,378 per QALY. Consequently, the researchers concluded that such a shift would be cost effective.

Universal screening rather than birth-cohort-based screening would be cost effective so long as no greater than 0.07 percent of non–baby boomer adults tested positive for HCV antibodies.

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

To read the study abstract, click here.

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