Veterans Affairs to Eliminate Hep C in Veterans

More than 125,000 veterans will have received lifesaving cures by October 2018.

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Officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have announced that the agency is on track to eliminate hepatitis C virus (HCV) in all veterans willing and able to be treated by the end of 2018. The announcement marks a major milestone in the nation's fight against viral hepatitis and means that more than 125,000 veterans will have received lifesaving cures by October of this year.

In October 2014, the VA had over 146,000 veterans living with HCV under its care, a number that's expected to drop to just 20,000 by October, thanks to the agency's commitment to providing hep C treatment.

The announcement stands in stark contrast to news articles from just a few years back that bemoaned the fact that the government couldn't afford to treat tens of thousands of U.S. veterans living with HCV, many of whom were infected during the Vietnam War. This was back when Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), Gilead's 12-week hepatitis cure cost nearly $84,000 per patient and threatened to cripple the VA's budget.

However, the VA is allowed by law to negotiate drug prices. In addition, several other hep C cures—such as AbbVie's Viekira Pak (dasabuvir/ombitasvir/paritaprevir/ritonavir) and Merck's Zepatier (elbasvir/grazoprevir)—have been brought to market over the last few years, driving competition up and drug costs down. Now, the VA can effectively treat veterans at a cost of roughly $25,300 per individual.

The VA estimates that it will spend nearly $751.2 million on hep C treatment in 2018, slightly up from the $748.8 million it spent last year.

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