Washington State Employees Now Have Unrestricted Access to Hepatitis C Treatment

September 2, 2016

Public employees in Washington state will now have unrestricted access to the latest hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatments through the state's Health Care Authority insurance program. Until now, the state would dole out medications only to its employees with the most severe illness, The Seattle Times reports.

Last week, King County Superior Court Judge Suzanne R. Parisien granted a preliminary injunction to the HCA to halt a policy that limited access to hepatitis C medications based on a patient's degree of liver damage, or fibrosis score. Now, members of Washington's Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) who are living with the virus will be able to access treatment regardless of how sick they are determined to be.

The order came in response to a lawsuit filed by two state employees. In the matter, Parisien also included as a protected class nearly 277,000 PEBB members living with hepatitis C. Lawyers said that in recent years, nearly 150 PEBB members had been turned down for care under the state authority's restrictive policies.

The Health Care Authority's initial decision to restrict hep C treatment was a stance originally supported by medical guidelines. However, that changed last year, when liver disease experts at the American Society for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) recommended that the drugs be used routinely to treat all people living with HCV, including those with mild cases of the disease.

Many private insurers in Washington still ration out HCV treatment. Washington's Department of Corrections also bases hepatitis C treatment for its inmates on the severity of their illness.

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