Generic Hepatitis C Treatment in Canada

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The Hepatitis C Situation in Canada
People with Hepatitis C in Canada are in a similar situation to people in countries like Ireland, Sweden and France. Hep C treatment is available through the government funded national health services however the huge cost of treatment and the high numbers of people with Hep C in Canada, estimated to be at least 300,000 make treating them all impossible.

Canada is paying about US$50,000 for Harvoni and Epclusa from Gilead and a little less for Zepatier, a new drug made by Merke, which is used to treat chronic hepatitis C virus genotype 1 infections in both treatment-naïve and has about the same cure rate as Harvoni.

So you can see that treating the entire Canadian Hep C population would cost the Canadian Health system at least US$15,000,000,000. Obviously such an amount is way outside of Canada's health budget so access to Hep C treatment in Canada is triaged. That is to say only the sickest people have access to treatment. In most Canadian States this requires a fibrosis reading of F3 or F4, though some states may offer treatment to patients who are F2.

However this flies in the face of all conventional medical wisdom, which says to treat diseases in the early stages before significant damage is done. What Canada Health is, in effect, saying "If you have Hep C we will offer you treatment but only after your liver has been seriously damaged by the disease." This is like saying to a cancer patient, "You have cancer but we will wait until it spreads through your body a bit more before we treat you."
Simply put it is an insane health policy because we know the longer the Hep C is active in the body the more liver damage is done and the greater the risk of getting liver cancer.

So people who discover that they have Hepatitis C naturally do not want to wait until their liver gets more damage; if they are F0 or F1 or F2 they want to get rid of the virus BEFORE they get to F3 of F4.
What at their options?

Well the obvious thing is to purchase their own treatment using licensed Indian generic Harvoni or

Epclusa or Sofosbuvir + Daclatasvir but here the Canadian government makes things very difficult. Canada has the most restrictive rules in the world for importing medicines for personal use and the Canadian government is hell bent of enforcing them to the most strict levels.
There was a loophole that was open for a short while whereby if the medicines were sent to a Canadian doctor or pharmacist that was allowed but last year medicines sent that way were blocked by Canada Health and Customs.

The next option, which I used successfully for a while, was to send the meds to a P.O. Box in the USA, just across the border and then the patient would drive down and pick up the meds themselves and drive home.
That worked fine for a while but now the Canadian Customs has a cyber link to all the deliveries to P.O. Boxes on the US / Canada border and they question people when they return to Canada about what they picked up from the Box.

I know this from personal experience because I had been organising meds for people from Canada this way for a while. Then one of my clients was returning home across the border with medicines for his sick wife when the border dude stopped him and asked " What was it you picked up from that P.O. Box today?"
Being an honest man, he explained that he had collected medicines for his very sick wife who was waiting at home to start treatment.

To cut a long story short the guard seized the meds and no amount of pleading and explaining would get the Canada Customs to release the medicines to him.

This is one of the emails I received from him:

"When I passed through the Canadian Customs the officer ask me the reason I have been to the USA, I said to him " For shopping." and I showed him my receipts from shopping. Then after that he looked at his computer and told me " But you have picked up something from the post box! Please show me the receipt and what did you pick up from the box?"
Then they saw the medicines. I showed the prescription. I explained the situation that my wife could not get treatment in Canada and she is very sick. But they did not care.
They say I am not allowed to bring to Canada any prescription drugs even for personal use with the prescription because it exists in Canada even though for that price that I can never buy the medicines.
Nobody cares my problems!!!!.
I now communicate by phone hoping for something to change. They called me but nothing has changed!
Can you tell me what is another way???"

Of course he was in despair and I was furious!!! So I figured out another way of getting the medicines to him and three weeks later he had the meds and his wife started treatment.

Click here to read the rest of this biog, including Greg's idea of how to get generics to Canadians.

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