Some Good News From Latvia

July 11, 2016 By Greg Jefferys

I have to admit that a lot of my blog posts lately have been a bit negative. I get quite angry about the greed of Big Pharma, the corruption in government and the medical establishment, the pathetic cowardly nature of doctors in the UK and so on. So I tend to focus on these things that are a bit negative.
So it is nice to be able to share some good news for a change, and this is very good news!

I mentioned in my last post that I was sending generic Harvoni and Sofosbuvir and Daclatasvir to Latvia from the UK because Latvia was preventing its citizens from importing Hep C generics direct from India themselves. So I had been organising shipments via Australia when I was there and via the UK when I was there. The UK was best because of the EU rules, once I got the meds into the UK then there was no risk of Latvian Customs intercepting them if I sent the medicines from the UK.
The problem was that there was a limit to how many shipments I could do from the UK and there are at least 50,000 people in Latvia with hepatitis C.

Anyway while I was in the UK I received this email from a guy in Latvia who was desperate to access generic Hepatitis C treatment from India.

HI Greg
I came across your blog through a friend's suggestion who works for Hep C prevention at the WHO.

My sister and her daughter both have chronic Hep C. Yesterday I went with her to the doctor which prescribes 12 weeks treatment regimen for genotype 3 (HCV-3): daclatasvir + sofosbuvir.

Of course, such treatment is not funded by the Latvian healthcare system. And we are looking to buy generics. I have pharmaceutical distributor contacts in India, I had worked before with for other purposes, but we realised that due to recent amendments in the government regulations, medicine import from third countries to Latvia has been made virtually impossible since this spring.

I noticed in your that you have helped some other persons from Latvia to obtain the necessary medicine via neighboring country. Could you let me know if this is still possible and how would that work (in particular for daclatasvir and sofosbuvir).

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So I wrote back explaining the options. Because I had a back log of orders from people in Europe I could not send anything from the UK and suggested this person consider taking his sister and niece to Lithuania where the rules were more favourable and where I could organise shipping the generic Sofosbuvir and Daclatasvir to.
I gave him the names of some contacts in Lithuania who I knew would help him, some weeks went by and then I received another email.

At about this time the Latvian news media picked up on an open letter written by a Latvian woman, a nurse, who had contracted Hep C during the course of her work. This woman's story received a lot of attention and started a very heated public debate about the terrible injustice of a government preventing its citizens accessing affordable generic medicines.
The email below discusses what was happening in Latvia.

Hi Greg

Thank you so much for organizing these generic Hepatitis medicines for me. I know how busy you are fighting this live/death fight for all people who suffers from Hep C. I'm reading your blog.

Lately there is also big attention in Latvia about all this drug deal. Yesterday in news portal was a story about woman who was working in laboratory in hospital for years diagnosing Hep C and now she became sick and tried to purchase generic Harvoni from India and of course Latvian customs seized her drugs and sent them back to India. In the news was a letter this woman wrote to the President of Latvia explaining how lot of people is betrayed by their own country. We pay taxes, we do care for our own health, but gov can't afford to heal people and there is only 160 spots for treatment with new medicine in a year. So basically, if you are infected but you don't have cirrhosis yet - you'r out until you will become really sick. Doesn't matter how old are you. So there are lot of respond from people here about this problem because nobody really realize a real number of people here infected. In this letter to the president woman was shocked about if gov can't provide treatment then how they dare to take away chance for those who have bought meds by themselves by their own money. This woman was literally crying in this letter that she have been loyal citizen worked in hospital, raised five children and now when she became sick this country doesnt care about her anymore.
It is a terrible thing

Even i'm not treated yet and still are sick ... there is days i can't get out of my head that i should try to do something here to help people with solution. I know that i don t have such a power here, but it ... feels like it would be right if i could help somehow ... spread the word or ... i don't know !

So I hope you'r doing fine and i am amazed with road you have took fighting the war against such enemy ... god bless you!

Best wishes

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The great news is that the combination of news media attention and a vigorous public debate caused the Latvian government to change its policy and rules on Latvian people importing generic Harvoni and Sofosbuvir and Daclatasvir from India. The next email explains the news situation.

Hi Greg,

I hope you are well.
I wanted to update that following public protests the new health minister has just canceled the restrictions to import medicines from non-EU countries for personal needs in Latvia. This is effective from this week.

I was wondering if it is possible to order directly to Latvia the necessary medicine from your distributors.

Your friend in Lithuania was really helpful but we would need to go to Lithuanian doctor, get the examinations, local prescriptions and pay another visit to Lithuania etc.

We have the necessary medical documentation (prescription and treatment recommendation from the Latvian doctor at hand), so direct shipping would be really great.

Let me know if that is possible
Thanks and regards,
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So now the Latvian government has changed the rules because of public pressure and now people in Latvia can import generic harvoni and other generic Hep C drugs by following simple guidelines.
This change in government policy is the result of a combination of factors that we have seen in Australia and New Zealand and to a lesser extent in the USA and the UK.

If the news media makes stories about the issues surrounding access to Hepatitis C treatment and the gross unfairness and the suffering caused by the terrible greed of big drug companies like Gilead then the public will understand what needs to be done and put pressure of the government and the hospitals.
The role of government is to serve the best interests of the people.
The role of doctors is to give their patients access to the things that they need to fight sickness and find health.
In countries like the USA and Canada and the UK neither the governments or the doctors are forfilling these basic requirements of their existence, indeed they do the opposite and put the interests of their people behind the interests of Big Pharma.

Latvia is a great example of where good media coverage and people power can bring about big positive changes for health outcomes for people with Hepatitis C.

These same principles will bring about changes in any country if enough people get together and make it happen.
Do not accept the status quo just because doctors and governments say that things will stay as they are. Things can be changed. It takes time, energy and commitment but things can be changed and changed for the better.

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