Hepatitis C News That Isn’t Fake

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A couple of months ago, headlines in the Guardian stated, “’Miracle’ hepatitis C drugs costing £30k per patient ’may have no clinical effect’.” These were horrible headlines, first because they were false; second because until you looked at the facts, it was disturbing. (You can read more about it at Horrendous Hepatitis Headlines and at There’s No Major Benefit to Curing Hepatitis C? Au Contraire, Say Experts.)

Although there is plenty of proof showing the fallacy of the Guardian’s headlines, a large study was published that truly puts this issue to rest. Conducted at major medical centers in four cities (Pittsburgh, New York City, Boston, and Doha, Qatar), Adeel Ajwad Butt and colleagues studied the effect of Viekira (paritaprevir/ritonavir, ombitasvir, dasabuvir) and Harvoni (ledipasvir/sofosbuvir) regimens upon mortality. They collected data from 1473 people treated with Viekira Pak and 5497 people treated with Harvoni. They compared this to 6970 score–matched untreated people. People with HIV, hepatitis B or liver cancer were excluded. This study was racially and geographically diverse; the median age was 61 to 62 years old.

The Bottom Line: The proportion of people who died was higher among those who were not treated for hepatitis C. This was apparent within the first 18 months of treatment. The presence of comorbidities (other medical problems) was associated with higher mortality. The researchers were uncertain as to whether the increased mortality was associated with the comorbidity itself or with hepatitis C.

Noteworthy is that the diagnoses of alcohol or drug abuse or dependence were not associated with increased mortality. The researchers advised, “A history of these conditions should not deter providers from initiating treatment.” An interesting finding was a significant reduction in mortality among Blacks who received hepatitis C treatment.

I wonder if the Guardian will be printing new headlines.

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