Hepatitis Headlines That Make My Head Spin

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I look at a lot of headlines having to do with hepatitis C and liver disease. I am just as susceptible as the next person to drawing rapid-fire conclusions from one-liners. Fortunately, I dig deeper, look for source information, and apply critical thinking to what I read, and often I find that the headlines don't match the content.

Here is an example. A recent headline read, "Adverse events from DAAs can persist for months after treatment, study finds." (MD Linx, 8/21/18) My initial response, "Eureka. People who have been complaining about lingering post-treatment side effects are going to be affirmed. This is exciting!"

Then I read the study. Every arm used ribavirin. Of course people are going to have side effects and these will linger. Ribavirin takes a long time to leave our bodies. It's half-life is so long, that women are advised not to get pregnant for 6 months after completing treatment. On a personal level, I found ribavirin to be a difficult drug to take and it took quite some time for my health to be restored.

The study concludes, "We found no difference in AEs possibly related to the DAA regimen in patients with CHC, but surprisingly, AEs possibly related to the DAA regimen persisted in a significant number of patients after treatment. This finding can be of importance for clinicians in relation to patient information concerning AEs possibly related to DAA treatment."

The word that stands out in their conclusions is 'surprisingly.' Seriously? You are surprised by this? The only explanations that I can think of that helps me understand how clinicians would be surprised by this is that they didn't listen to or talk to any patients after treatment was over. I can't think of a single person who didn't find ribavirin a bit much, and these adverse effects lasted at least a month after hepatitis C treatment ended.

Personally, this study is a waste of time. Researchers – look at the more commonly used regimens, the ones not using ribavirin, and then tell us what you found.

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