Veterans with Hepatitis C

November 10, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Approximately 5.4% of U.S. veterans are infected with chronic hepatitis C, tripling that of the general U.S. population. Approximately 174,000 veterans under care of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) have confirmed chronic hepatitis C. Veterans with the highest risks for hepatitis C are those who served in the Vietnam War era, those with alcohol or substance use disorders, and those with psychiatric conditions or homelessness.

Among veterans, the prevalence of cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and liver cancer is increasing. Over the past 10 years, the number of hepatitis C-positive veterans diagnosed with cirrhosis has tripled to over 25,000, while over the same period the number of hepatitis C-infected veterans diagnosed with liver cancer has increased by ten-fold.

Now the VHA has a new problem on their hands - finding the money to treat veterans with hepatitis. An article published by AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) reported that Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) has brought this issue forward. Sen. Sanders' office reported that the cost of treating hepatitis C-positive veterans is $1.3 billion over the next two years. Gilead charges $50,000 per VHA patient while selling their drug cheaply in other countries. AHF has called on Gilead Sciences to lower the price of its two hepatitis C drugs, Harvoni and Sovaldi.

"Gilead's rabid greed has now extended to extracting as much profit as possible from the care of America's service men and women," said Michael Weinstein, President of AHF. "As a nation, we have promised the members of our armed forces - men and women who put their lives at risk protecting our freedoms - that when they come home, we will take care of them. By charging our VA system nearly $50,000 per person for the treatment of hepatitis C, Gilead is driving up health care costs by billions of dollars which will ultimately lead to the rationing of care for our veterans."

When are we going to step up and serve those who served us? Let's start now. Show your support for veterans by calling your Senators and Congressional Representative, and expressing them to your concerns about the astronomical price of hepatitis C drugs.

For more information, visit:

HCVets

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs State of Care for Veterans with Chronic Hepatitis C

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