Is the World Hepatitis Alliance the puppet of Big Pharma?

August 18, 2016 By Greg Jefferys

The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) claims that everything it does is aimed to benefit people with Hepatitis yet it does not advocate for access to generic treatment for people with Hep C. Indeed it seems to completely ignore the fact that getting treatment with generic Hep C drugs is the only way that most people will have any hope of curing their Hep C.
Why does the WHA appear to ignore this critical fact?
This is a question that I would like to put before you, my reader.

The WHA likes to be seen as a guiding light in eradicating viral Hepatitis, but is it really looking after the best interests of people with Hep C or is it looking after the interests of Big Pharma?

I have formed my opinions based on the best available information that I have been able to get. I have written to the World Hepatitis Alliance and asked for clarification on the generic issue but after a couple of pages of replies nothing is any clearer. So I will express my opinions here without fear or favor; however if I state something that is incorrect or in error then I invite you to contact me and I will immediately amend any inaccuracy.

Who, or what, is the WHA?

The World Hepatitis Alliance describes itself as an organization whose purpose is providing global leadership to drive action to help eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. It claims to be a patient led and patient-driven not-for-profit, non-governmental organization. However the reality is that the WHA gets almost all of its annual US$3,000,000 budget from “donations” from Big Pharma.

So whilst the World Hepatitis Alliance claims to be fighting for the rights of people with Hep C the fact that they are actually funded by Big Pharma seems to indicate that they are actually a Hepatitis awareness pressure group that puts pressure onto governments and their health departments to buy Big Pharma’s products.
I would suggest that this is why you will never see any mention of generic treatment options in anything that the World Hepatitis Alliance publishes or promotes (that I am aware of). Nor does the World Hepatitis Alliance lobby governments to improve access to generics for citizens in countries where generic Hep C treatment is blocked, such as Serbia and Canada and Italy.

Is the reason for this because they rely on Big Pharma for their funding. Is this the reason that the World hepatitis Alliance promotes Big Pharma’s outrageously priced medicines not the cheaper, more affordable, generic alternatives? I believe so.

How is the WHA structured?
The World Hepatitis Alliance is made up of an Executive Board and a President. The board is selected from representatives from six regions around the world. The board members belong to regional Hepatitis organisations. Like the WHA, most of these organisations also rely on Big Pharma for the bulk of their funding.
For example Hepatitis Australia gets around $250,000 per annum from “corporate donations”.

Like the WHA these groups all lobby governments to increase funding to make medicines available for people with Hepatitis. Now this seems like a good thing but the one thing that most of these groups have in common with the World Hepatitis Alliance is that they do not promote the use of generic Hep C medicines. They promote the use of Big Pharma’s much more expensive medicines and actively discourage people from seeking generic treatment.

Around the world Big Pharma funded “advocacy groups” like Hepatitis Australia actively worked against the promotion of generic treatment of Hep C, despite the fact that generic DAAs have been proven to be just as effective as the much more expensive brand versions and despite the fact that these medicines are available at a price that is about 100th the price of Big Pharma’s medicines. Yet almost none of the World Hepatitis Alliance aligned Hepatitis “advocacy” groups suggest the generic route to their members or to the general Hep C population even though this is the best treatment option for tens of millions of people.

So I believe that the WHA will never speak in favour of generics, will never lobby governments to create better access to generics or to take advantage of the lower costs and affordability that is created by the generics because they are puppets of Big Pharma.

So we see that there is a strong conflict of interests when an organisation claims to represent the best interests of people with Hepatitis C but receives most of its funding from Big Pharma. They are always going to have a bias against generic treatments and support the products of Big Pharma.

It is a very clever plan by Big Pharma. They fund Hep C advocacy groups to put pressure on governments to fund the purchase of the expensive branded medicines and and at the same time the same groups warn of the imaginary risks of using generics.

So the WHA claims big victories whenever a government buckles to pressure to fund the purchase of Big Pharma’s Hep C meds and Big Pharma makes another few billion dollars profit and laughs all the way to the bank.

But for most countries the health budget is limited and when the lobbying of pressure groups like the WHA causes a government to put money into buying Harvoni or the VPak at around $50,000 per treatment some other area of the health budget loses funds.
The cuts might be from nursing or Emergency or the treatment of some other chronic disease.
If the WHA was sincere about eradicating Hep C from the world it would be lobbying every government on Earth to order bulk generics from India. Purchased in bulk a 12 week treatment of generic Harvoni would cost less than $700 per treatment instead of $50,000 or more.
Then there would be a real chance of eliminating Hep C from the Earth.
But the WHA does not do this and there is only one reason why they would not: they are puppets of Big Pharma.

Why have I written this?

I have written this piece about the WHA because it needs to be said that if the WHA actually used its considerable resources to promote access to safe generic treatment from licensed manufacturers and reliable suppliers they COULD make a big difference and millions of lives would be saved and much suffering stopped.

The fact that the WHA does not do that which is best for the people it claims to care about is a sad example of the corruption that pervades the world of Big Pharma.

Appendage to the WHA story.
I have to admit being worried about publishing the above article because I do not wish to offend folk but within 12 hours of publication I received the below email from a person in Romania. After reading it I felt that I had done the right thing to bring this problem into the public arena because the example below shows exactly how these things work and Big Pharma's total disregard for human suffering.

Dear Greg
I just read your blog about WHA. I enjoyed reading it and at the same time made me sad because you described the true situation. I wish it would have been different, but it is not.

Perhaps it should be added that through WHA or the so called "patient associations", people get brain washed to wait and wait and wait for a treatment that will be, hopefully, made available to them just before being close to death.

I can give you as example the recent case from Romania which shows that the pressure of Big Pharma (via a patient association being funded by pharma companies) is working and it made the Romanian government allocate more money for treating more HCV patients with branded drugs. Soon 10 000 people will get treated with the interferon free therapy because the government decided to increase the funds for the treatment, as the previous budget was conceived to treat 5000 people only. I would estimate that with these extra funds, more than ***250 000*** *people could have been treated with generic drugs. This patient association was making lobby for many time so that more people get treated and pressured the government to allocate more money. At the same time the association signals quite clear that the path of generic drugs means a lot of risks, the most probable effect being to scare people in not taking it, and all this under a so called umbrella of "patient safety".*

I truly hope that with your efforts as well as the efforts of dr. Freeman, more and more people will be able to distinguish the reality from what WHA and Big Pharma is saying and get treated with effective and cheap generic drugs.

kind Regards

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