Hepatitis C Patients Take Extreme Measures for Cheaper Cures

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Some people living with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) are going to extreme lengths to obtain cheaper versions of Gilead Science's HCV drug Sovaldi (sofosbuvir). It boasts over 90 percent cure rates, costs $84,000 for 12 weeks of treatment in the United States, and is being distributed at 1 percent of the cost in many low-income countries, Bloomberg Business reports.

In one recent plan for cheaper treatment, Steve Miller, chief medial officer at Express Scripts Holding Co.—the largest U.S. pharmacy benefits manager—considered docking an Indian cruise ship off the coast of Miami stocked with generic versions of Sovaldi. His idea was to ferry U.S. customers to the boat, supplying them with hep C drugs for $83,000 less than their U.S. listing price.

Miller then discovered the scheme would almost certainly violate U.S. drug importation laws. However, the executive, and many other hep C treatment advocates, are still looking for creative ways to get cheaper drugs to those in need.

One alternative option gaining momentum among HCV-positive people is to travel to one of the 91 developing countries that are licensed to sell copies of Sovaldi at well below U.S. market rates. Hep blogger Greg Jefferys is one of them. Check out his story here.

According to Jonathan Edelheidt, the chief executive officer of the Medical Tourism Association, his group's members are already preparing to help more people toward a solution like Jefferys's. The U.S. organization Health Flight Solutions is also putting together a network of foreign doctors and hospitals that are willing to prescribe generic hep C drugs to U.S. patients.

However, there are some alternative paths that health experts warn are a no-go. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has specifically warned that many hep C drugs sold by Internet pharmacies are counterfeit or possibly tainted with harmful chemicals. The FDA also warns against potential online fraud schemes. For a full overview, click here.

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