Two Hep C Drugs Approved; One Doubles the Cure Rate for Blacks

May 27, 2011

A hepatitis C infection is no joke, especially for black Americans who don't typically respond well to standard therapy. But there's good news: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved two treatment drugs, and one in particular doubles the cure rate among African Americans, Medical News Today reported.

The two new drugs that received FDA approval are Vertex's Incivek (telaprevir) and Merck's Victrelis (boceprevir). Both treatments are used in combination with standard hep C treatment, which is pegylated interferon and ribavirin. Incivek and Victrelis are the first new generation of liver disease treatments in 20 years and caused plenty of excitement in the health care industry.

But doctors with African-American patients are even more excited about Victrelis. Why? Because that drug helped boost blacks' hep C cure rate from 23 percent to 53 percent, said Howard Monsour, MD, chief of hepatology at Houston's The Methodist Hospital.

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a viral infection that's spread through direct blood-to-blood contact from sharing needles, other equipment used to inject drugs or items such as razor blades; from needle-stick injuries and when open wounds or mucous membranes are exposed to infected blood; and from blood or blood-product transfusions (especially before 1992).

About 75 percent of people infected with acute HCV ultimately develop chronic infection. And of these patients, at least 20 percent develop cirrhosis of the liver. This condition can lead to liver failure and is one of the most common reasons for liver transplants in the United States.

The clinical trial results that led to the approval of Incivek and Victrelis showed a 65 to 75 percent cure rate in people who had never been treated for HCV and those who had experienced a relapse, Monsour said. What's more, researchers also noted a 55 percent cure rate in HCV patients who had responded poorly to treatment and not been cured of the virus.

"The drugs have also shortened the treatment time from a year to, in most cases, six to eight months," Monsour added.

But dampening that enthusiasm is the meds' price tag. Incivek costs $49,200 for a 12-week course of treatment, while Victrelis rings up at $48,400 for 48 weeks of treatment. "Both price points are

outrageous," said Fair Pricing Coalition (FPC) member Lynda Dee in a statement from the organization. Because the meds must be used in combination with other drugs, a complete regimen might cost between $150,000 to $200,000 in the near future.

The FPC fears these hefty price tags will stop people with HCV from having access to the drugs, and that the prices will set excessively unreasonable future price points for many HCV drugs currently in development.

For this reason, the FPC has worked closely with the pharmaceutical industry during the past two years to make access to co-pay programs and patient assistance programs (PAPs) easier for people living with viral hepatitis (and HIV).

If you're affected or know someone who is, click here for a list of hepatitis B and C (and HIV) co-pay and patient assistance programs on AIDSmeds.com.

And if you just want to know more about hepatitis in general, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/hepatitisC-AfricanAmericans-curerates-20536-2100