Meds Madness

Will a breakthrough hep C drug also break the bank?

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When the game-changing hepatitis C pill Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) garnered FDA approval several months ago, an outcry about its cost was heard ’round the world.

A standard 12-week course of treatment for the liver disease rings up at $84,000, which breaks down to about $1,000 a pop. But the pill’s maker, Gilead Sciences, says the price tag is justified because Sovaldi offers patients the best of both worlds: greater convenience and a likely cure.

What’s more, Gilead adds, in the long run Sovaldi would save money for health insurers; without the new treatment, people living with hep C would require long periods of care and expensive operations. As Gilead’s COO John Milligan put it: “When you talk to [health insurance payers] about the long-term benefits, they recognize they’re not going to have to worry as much about liver transplants and other care they’re going to have to give.”

In general, the newest hep C treatments all ring up for more than $50,000 for each course of treatment. The good news is that these treatments often forgo interferon, an injectable that’s notorious for its flu-like side effects.

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