

Hepatitis Alert™

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“Your liver performs hundreds of miracles 24/7. It needs your TLC to keep it working at top speed.”

Helmut King Heel
Chief Executive Officer

There are encouraging reports that Pharmasset's experimental PSI 7977 oral drug cured 100% of patients in their clinical study. Gilead Sciences agreed to pay \$11 billion to acquire Pharmasset in the battle against hepatitis C. Although the study was small, the news was one of the highlights at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases. Phase 111 clinical trials have begun using the drug in combination with ribavirin without interferon.

Legislative Update

On November 4, 2011, the *Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2011* was introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Bill Cassidy (R-LA-6) and Mike Honda (D-CA-15), and in the Senate by Senator John Kerry (D-MA). The House and Senate bills were designated H.R. 3381 and S. 1809 and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, respectively. The introduction of the hepatitis legislation had been delayed for months and was greatly anticipated by the hepatitis community. Among other things, the *Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2011* would establish a national system for HCV screening, encourage the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to update HCV screening guidelines, and authorize Congress to appropriate funds for HCV screening activities. The House and Senate versions of the bill are nearly identical, with the exception of two minor findings recommended by Congressman Cassidy in the House bill. There is encouraging movement on this bill.

Mature Adults Alert

Beyond the age of concern about becoming pregnant, older individuals no longer see the need to use condoms. However, having unprotected sex poses a serious risk of contracting hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. These viral infections can cause serious liver and other health problems without showing any signs or symptoms.

HCV Survival Beyond Needles

An international team of investigators proved the hepatitis C virus could survive on inanimate surfaces for up to seven days. Another study in France detected the virus on 80% of alcohol swabs obtained from injection drug users. This suggests that swabs that may be shared by users are risking the transmission of hepatitis C.

Needle and syringe exchange programs have been introduced in many countries to control the epidemic. They have been highly effective in preventing HIV infections but hepatitis C transmissions still continue.

The hepatitis C virus can be rendered inactive by commercially available disinfectant or heating to 65°-70° for 90 seconds.

Spoons and/or cookers are used to heat diluted heroin into solution. This liquid is drawn into a syringe and will potentially contaminate the spoon if hepatitis C infected blood is present in the syringe. Reusing contaminated cookers could lead to infection even if sterile syringes are used.

HCV and Vitamin D Deficiency

Reports provided by Digestive Diseases Weekly revealed that 64% of patients with chronic hepatitis B (HBV) or hepatitis C (HVC) virus infection have low levels of vitamin D. Treating vitamin D deficiency can potentially decrease the high rate of osteopenia and osteoporosis in this population including bone loss related to some anti viral therapies, according to Dr. Maya Gambarin-Gelwan at Weill Medical Center. Among 395 chronic viral hepatitis patients at the center between 2007-2009, 31% were vitamin D insufficient and 33% were vitamin D deficient. The data revealed vitamin D deficiency was more prevalent among those infected with HBV than with HCV (73% vs. 60%, respectively.)



Protocols Breached in Cleaning Endoscopic Equipment

2500 veterans were told the colonoscopy they had at the Miami VA Hospital might have been performed with improperly cleaned equipment. It was reported that the equipment had simply been rinsed between uses rather than sterilized by steam and chemicals as required by the manufacturer.

Results of blood tests of the 2500 showed that five people were positive for HIV, eight for hepatitis C and one for hepatitis B. There was no way to know if they had been infected by the improperly cleaned equipment; however, the VA promised lifetime care for those infected.

Mary Berrocal, who headed the Miami VA hospital since 2008 will be reassigned and replaced on an interim basis as a result of this issue.

HFI'S Summits Reach Hundreds of Healthcare Providers

A series of five Viral Hepatitis Summits featuring experts in the field updating nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, substance abuse and HIV/AIDS counselors received broad praise from the attendees. Presentations at each of the summits in Baltimore, Chicago, Tampa, Omaha, and Phoenix provided the most current information regarding diagnosis, new treatments, and counseling patients with depression.

Dr. Raymond Koff, speaker at each Summit shared his thoughts about the programs, "What struck me most about the Summits is the enormous thirst for knowledge I have seen in the audiences. Whether the questioner is an experienced clinician, a public health nurse, or a mid-level practitioner, they have listened carefully and have asked relevant, highly sophisticated questions." He noted while the big picture issues of epidemiology and future advances are discussed, questions and answers in terms of personal experiences and clinical vignettes were overwhelmingly appreciated and supported the learning process.

Continuing Education Units (CEU's) were available to nurses and substance abuse counselors. Each participant received enduring teaching tools including educational DVDs and print materials for use in their practice.

Local planning committees ensured that issues of importance to their clientele were addressed. Post-presentation evaluations received proclaimed the information provided enhanced their ability to understand laboratory tests, to encourage patients to seek treatment, and to understand the importance of adherence to their treatment.

Additional Summits are planned for 2012 in Michigan, New Mexico, Kansas, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin in collaboration with public health officials. For additional information or interest in co-hosting a Summit in your area, please call 1-800-891-0707 or email tkt@hepatitisfoundation.org.

Help Thy Self: Early Treatment and Adherence to Treatment Essential

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are both called "Silent Killers." These viruses enter the body through the skin and mucus membranes and travel via the blood stream to the liver. They invade liver cells and rapidly begin to make copies of themselves thereby accelerating the rate of damage to the liver.

Early diagnosis and treatment are critical to stop this process before severe damage is done. Viruses mutate in the process of making copies therefore making it more difficult to interrupt their replication. Treatments initiated as quickly as possible after exposure to these viruses will have a better chance of stopping this destruction.

Compliance with daily doses of medication is essential to achieving a positive outcome by ridding the liver of these viruses. Skipping or missing doses of medication delay the therapeutic response essential to controlling these viruses.

Dollars Well Spent

Hepatitis Foundation International in collaboration with Partners in Liver Wellness initiative focused on:

- Training 800 healthcare providers face to face and thousands more via webinars with the latest information on hepatitis and liver health.
- Educating children 5 – 10 years of age with user-friendly ways to maintain a healthy liver as well as decrease damaging activities. Thousands of coloring books in various languages have been distributed.
- Informing minority college students about the health impact drugs and alcohol can have on their liver by addressing binge drinking.
- Presenting lectures and media promoting liver wellness and prevention of viral hepatitis to over 10,000 employees at major corporations
- Responding to 1200 inquiries from our toll free 800 hotline.

We are grateful for your support that enables us to provide these services.

Screening Cancer Patients for HBV

A recent study at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston revealed that only 17% of over 10,000 patients who started chemotherapy were screened beforehand for hepatitis B virus despite CDC recommendations to do so.

Of those screened, 151 (8%) proved to positive for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) and/or antibody to hepatitis B core antigen (anti-HBc). In all, 34 of them, (23%) reactivated during chemotherapy. Prophylaxis to prevent its reactivation during chemotherapy lowers their mortality.

Among nine patients whose hepatitis B reactivated despite prophylaxis - in most cases with lamivudine (Epivir) - 2 patients (22%) died. Among the 11 who were treated with antivirals only after reactivation, 8 (72%) died. And of the 14 who were not treated with antivirals for their reactivation, 10 (71%) died.

The study findings address this gap, showing that preventable reactivation does occur. Prophylactic antivirals [can] dramatically reduce mortality in cancer patients with hepatitis B. "You need to prophylax them before chemotherapy." Dr. Jessica Hwang said, lead investigator in the study.

It's "a very simple solution to prevent potentially life-threatening complications" from the virus, said Dr. T. Jake Liang, president of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and chief of the Liver Diseases Branch of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

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Hepatitis Foundation International

504 Blick Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20904
1-800-891-0707
www.HepatitisFoundation.org
www.PartnersInLiverWellness.org