Web Tool Aids Hepatitis C Care

SAN FRANCISCO—Mastering the fundamentals of treating infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) may have become markedly easier, thanks to a Web-based tool called HepCure.

Developed by researchers in New York City, the HepCure platform is designed to train a new generation of HCV providers, collect real-world data and foster comparative effectiveness research, all while keeping patients better informed about the disease than ever before.

"HepCure began with the basic desire to increase capacity among primary care providers to provide hepatitis C patients with relevant and timely care," said Jeffrey J. Weiss, PhD, associate professor of medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. "And it has grown to be a three-pronged, interrelated approach that involves a patient app, provider dashboard and webinar series."

HepCure is a multidisciplinary collaboration between the institution, the New York State Department of Health and community health centers. As Dr. Weiss and his colleagues reported at the 2015 annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD; abstract 1151), the open-access HepCure toolkit (hepcure.org) is designed to enhance providers’ ability to deliver guideline-based care to patients with HCV. The app provides education, medication reminders and a platform for tracking adherence and symptoms. Finally, the tele-education platform gives medical providers the opportunity to connect with experts and discuss management, including treatment options.

"HepCure was a great collaborative effort," said Ponni V. Perumalswami, MD, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Liver Diseases at Mount Sinai, who worked on the project.

Built Around Guidelines

First, a working group of multidisciplinary HCV experts met to develop content for the dashboard. Input from the group was used to develop the website’s framework, which was further refined after focus groups with providers and patients. National treatment guidelines from AASLD and the Infectious Diseases Society of America were used to identify key patient characteristics to determine treatment options to build decision support algorithms.

"One of the best things about the toolkit is that once a provider enters key patient characteristics, the toolkit can relay treatment options based on national treatment guidelines for that provider. And these are automatically updated as soon as a new regimen comes out."

—Ponni V. Perumalswami, MD

Currently designed for use in the United States, HepCure can ultimately be adapted globally, in conjunction with local HCV treatment guidelines, according to its developers. In the next iteration, the toolkit will be integrated with institutional electronic medical records, they said.

Lucinda K. Porter, RN, contributing editor at HepMag.com, and author of "Free From Hepatitis C," called HepCure a "brilliant" use of technology that will make a difference in the lives of patients.

"It puts powerful tools in the hands of hepatitis C patients, connecting them to information and support," Ms. Porter said. "Personally, when I have more power over my health, I have less fear, I listen better, I think better, and I take better action over my health."

"My favorite feature of the HepCure app is that you can keep important information all in one place," Ms. Porter added. "I wish information about the HepCure app was given to every hepatitis C patient."

—Michael Plessides

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