

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,” Dr. Perumalswami told *Gastroenterology & Endoscopy News*. “And these are automatically updated as soon as a new regimen comes out.”

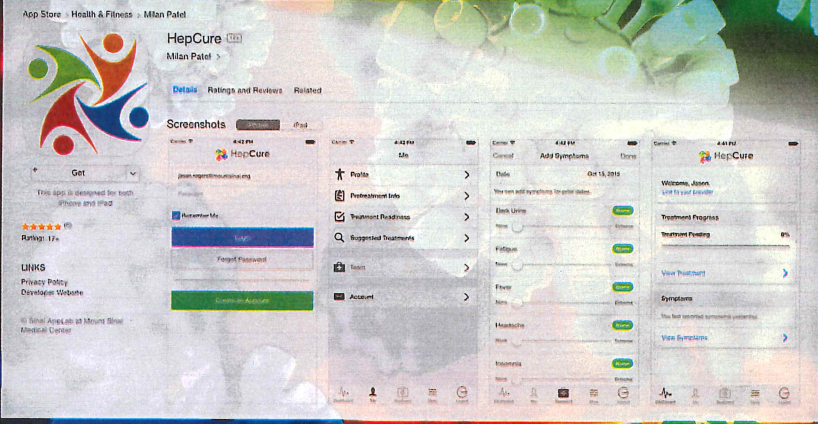
The patient app allows patients to take an active role in their disease process, supporting them from diagnosis to cure and beyond. The app allows patients to learn more about their condition, track their treatment and connect with their care team. Using the dashboard, providers can link with their patients; review data entered by patients, lab results, adherence and symptoms while on treatment; and release selected lab data directly to the patient. The app also has the capability to de-identify patient data,

allowing providers to discuss selected cases at weekly tele-education sessions with experts.

“We included the webinar component because we're trying to train more providers about what quality health care around hepatitis C looks like,” Dr. Perumalswami said. “We intend this to create a hub-and-spokes model, where there's one expert working with a group of less experienced providers. We're trying to create a forum for expert providers who already exist around the world to build capacity in their local communities.”

As the researchers reported, the HepCure provider dashboard (providers.hepcure.org) was launched in November 2014. More than 40 weekly tele-education sessions have been conducted since February 2015, each of which has been archived with open access to registered users of the site. Sessions have been accessed by an average of 13 attendees each week, while archived sessions have been viewed an average of eight times.

“So far, we've had quite a few patients using the app,” Dr. Perumalswami added. “They've all said that it really helps them connect to their provider and keep them up-to-date on when they need to be taking their drugs. Now we're trying to spread the word and let clinicians know that these tools are available.”



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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 Vlessides

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