The Urgency of Hepatitis C Screening for Baby Boomers

Hepatitis C is a deadly but curable disease.

Hepatitis C is a serious and sometimes fatal disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. Over time, it can lead to advanced liver disease, liver cancer, and liver failure. As many as 3.9 million people in the United States have hepatitis C. Most are baby boomers.

Medical and public health experts agree that everyone born from 1945-1965 should be tested once for hepatitis C.

Americans born from 1945-1965 (baby boomers) are most impacted by hepatitis C. Baby boomers account for over 75 percent of hepatitis C cases in the U.S.¹

The majority of people living with and dying from hepatitis C are baby boomers, yet most of them remain undiagnosed and unaware of their infection. Men, African Americans, and veterans are disproportionately affected within this birth cohort. Because many baby boomers have lived with hepatitis C for 20 to 40 years, liver-related complications, including liver cancer, liver failure and liver-related deaths are expected to peak in the next decade.

Many baby boomers with hepatitis C have advanced liver disease and need immediate care. An estimated 35 percent of undiagnosed baby boomers currently have advanced liver disease.² The projected numbers of advanced liver disease and cases of liver cancer are expected to rise through 2020.3

An estimated 12 percent of cirrhotic patients have advanced to decompensated cirrhosis and the number of patients with severe liver damage is expected to continue to increase through 2020-2030. The incidence of hepatitis C-related liver cancer is expected to peak in 2019 at almost 14,000 cases per year if more baby boomers are not diagnosed and linked to care.

Hepatitis C is a rising cause of death among baby boomers. Deaths due to hepatitis C have exceeded deaths related to HIV/AIDS nationally since 2007.

Baby boomers account for approximately 75 percent of American deaths from hepatitis C. According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hepatitis C contributed to the deaths of nearly 20,000 Americans in 2013, and because the disease isn't often reported on death certificates, annual fatalities are thought to actually exceed 60,000.4

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Costs of a baby boomer Epidemic of Liver Disease. New York, NY: Milliman, Inc; May 18, 2009.

²McGarry LJ et al. Hepatology. 2012;55(5):1344-1355.

⁵ Vachon, M.-L., Dieterich, D. T. (2012), A great time to invest in baby Boomer's hepatitis C! Hepatology, 56: 1575–1577. doi: 10.1002/hep.25898



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. MMWR. 2012;61:1-32; Adapted from Pyenson B, et al. Consequences of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

Adapted from Davis GL, et al. Gastroenterology. 2010,138(2):513-521
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Viral Hepatitis Statistics and Surveillance." http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/Statistics/

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Hepatitis C is curable. Identifying and curing people with hepatitis C is critical to prevent serious disease and death.

Screening baby boomers for hepatitis C has been shown to be cost-effective, and reduces the costs of caring for patients with cirrhosis, liver transplants, and other complications. ⁵ Most insurers, including Medicare, now cover one-time hepatitis C testing for baby boomers at no cost.

Most people with hepatitis C can now be cured in a matter of weeks with new highly effective treatment that has few side effects.

Recommendations for expanding hepatitis C testing among Baby Boomers:

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) and CDC agree: everyone born during 1945 – 1965 should be tested once for hepatitis C. The health care system and federal/state governments have a responsibility to ensure that these recommendations are implemented:

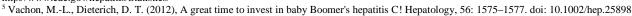
- Health care systems should integrate hepatitis C testing into their Electronic Health Records. A baby boomer prompt is fast and easy for doctors and can be as simple as adding one additional test on a lab slip, and then the prompt goes away.
- Private insurers should encourage medical providers in their health plans to test baby boomer patients for hepatitis C.
- The federal government should educate medical providers, particularly those serving Medicare beneficiaries, about the USPSTF and CDC recommendations that everyone born from 1945-1965 receive a one-time hepatitis C test.
- Congress should approve \$62.8 million in the Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations bill for CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis to expand viral hepatitis services, including hepatitis C testing programs. Congress should also pass the Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2015 (S. 1287/H.R. 1101), bipartisan legislation that would improve surveillance, education, and testing programs for hepatitis B and C.
- State Medicaid programs should cover hepatitis C testing at no cost for baby boomers and others at risk, in traditional and expanded Medicaid programs.
- State Legislatures should develop policies that expand hepatitis C testing, including legislation similar to bills passed in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Colorado which mandate or encourage providers to offer hepatitis C testing to baby boomers.

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¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. MMWR. 2012;61:1-32; Adapted from Pyenson B, et al. Consequences of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)