



Hepatitis C (HCV): Why Screen in an Uncertain Treatment Climate

Current challenges in access to new HCV treatments have resulted in reluctance among some medical providers to test their patients. This fact sheet outlines why HCV screening is vital, even during this uncertain treatment climate.

- **Patients have a right to know their status.** Just as with any disease, patients have a right to know about their health in order to make the best decisions about their ongoing healthcare needs. In populations where HCV infection is higher among marginalized groups, HCV testing linked to prevention and treatment could reduce health disparities.
- **Screening is essential to find seriously ill patients.** Screening is the only way to identify patients with cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. These patients urgently need to be treated and cured to prevent liver failure and premature death.
- **Treatment begins at diagnosis.** Diagnosis provides an opportunity for providers to talk to patients about liver wellness, alcohol reduction and ideally cessation, diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Early diagnosis provides an opportunity to empower patients to help limit progression of their disease, regardless of treatment initiation.
- **Screening is medically indicated and evidence-based.** Screening is recommended for all persons born 1945-1965 (Baby Boomers), per the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). CDC/USPSTF also recommend screening for persons at increased risk for HCV infection, including current or former injection drug users, recipients of clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987 or blood transfusions/organ transplants before 1992, healthcare workers who have been exposed to the virus, and persons with HIV.
- **Screening is free to many patients.** Screening is covered with no cost share by Medicare, expanded Medicaid programs and private health insurance as preventive health screenings due to Affordable Care Act implementation.
- **Screening helps identify needs of patient population and make appropriate resource decisions.** With 75% of those infected with HCV unaware of their status, it is essential to identify as many persons as possible to better understand the disease and allocate resources to reflect the true magnitude of HCV's impact on thousands of lives.
- **Treatment climate is fluctuating.** The options for HCV treatment are constantly changing and improving. While not all treatments will be immediately available to all patients, uncertainty about treatment is not a reason to fail to screen for a potentially fatal disease.
- **Diagnosis prevents transmission to others.** Knowing one's status is the first step to ensuring that patients take precautionary measures to prevent transmission to others. Screening provides an opportunity to educate patients about this infectious disease and ways to stop it from spreading.

For more information, visit www.nvhr.org/program or email info@nvhr.org.