Zepatier Zaps Acute Hep C in 8 Weeks

Among a group of largely HIV-positive gay and bi men, Zepatier (grazoprevir/elbasvir) boasted a 99 percent cure rate.

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Eight weeks of Merck's Zepatier (grazoprevir/elbasvir) boasted a near-perfect hepatitis C virus (HCV) cure rate among 80 Dutch and Belgian men who have sex with men who entered a recent study with a very recent, or acute, case of the virus that they had contracted sexually.

All the study participants had genotype 1a or 4 of HCV. Seventy-three men were coinfected with HIV. Nineteen (24 percent) of the acute HCV infections represented reinfections among men previously cured of that virus.

Among the 79 men about whom there is sufficient follow-up information, 78 were cured of the virus. By comparison, among the members of a previous study who were chronically infected with HCV and were all coinfected with HIV, the cure rate after the same regimen was 96 percent.

Consequently, the study authors concluded that eight weeks of Zepatier treatment among those acutely infected works as well as 12 weeks of the regimen among those who are chronically infected.

"Among certain key populations, like HIV-positive men who have sex with men, onward transmission of hepatitis C is still ongoing, as outlined by the high incidence and high reinfection rates in this key population," says the study's lead author, Anne Boerekamps, MD, an infectious disease specialist at Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, Netherlands. "Treating these patients in the acute phase of infection can prevent onward transmission of hepatitis C to sexual partners."

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