

IHS Calls for Urgent Early Access Programme for Hepatitis C

Treatments

News Release

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IHS Calls for Urgent Early Access Programme for new Hepatitis C Treatments

The Irish Haemophilia Society is calling for an immediate positive decision on an early access programme for seriously ill people with Hepatitis C to allow them to avail of new therapies that could save their lives.

Of the 12,365 patients in Ireland who need Hepatitis C treatment, 350 people have been identified by the specialist hepatologists to be in need of urgent treatment.

This group cannot medically tolerate the currently available Interferon based therapies due to severe liver damage which increases their risk of death if subjected to these treatments. The 350 people affected require treatments that are not based on interferon which involves a combination of two drugs.

There were 264 people with haemophilia who were infected with Hepatitis C through blood or blood products. Of these, 106 were also infected with HIV. A total of 113 people with haemophilia have died of HIV or Hepatitis C to date with 38 who dying solely of Hepatitis C.

Irish Haemophilia Society Chief executive, Brian O'Mahony, commented: *"Too many of our members have died. We provide continued support to all our members with Hepatitis C, including to the 50 who were cured of Hepatitis C through treatment."*

He added: *"Those who are now living with advanced liver disease as a result of Hepatitis C deserve a chance to live and we call on the Minister of Health and the HSE to agree, without further delay, to an early access programme which would save lives and save money."*

An early access programme for the new therapies, if commenced immediately, would save lives through prevention of decompensated liver disease, liver cancer or the requirement for liver transplants. It would directly save the government an estimated €10.5 million due to the availability free of charge of one of the new therapies prior to licencing in October.

An expert group, chaired by Dr Deirdre Mulholland of the Department of Health and Children, is currently examining the new treatment options.

"We believe that an immediate positive decision is required on an early access programme. If action is delayed, people will die and the subsequent human and financial cost will be even greater," stated Mr O'Mahony.

Commenting on the current situation, Professor Suzanne Norris, Consultant Hepatologist at St James's Hospital and Chair of the Irish Hepatitis C Outcomes Research Network said: *"There is a very narrow window of opportunity for government to avail of these very significant cost savings and allow us as clinicians to treat those with advanced liver disease who are most at risk of liver failure."*

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