



Hepatitis C

VA research on hepatitis C includes clinical trials of treatments, epidemiologic studies, investigations into the biological mechanisms of infection, and studies on improving quality of life for patients with this condition. A particular focus for VA researchers is improving the care of Veterans who are infected with both the hepatitis C virus and HIV.

Examples of VA Research Advances

Hepatitis C, PTSD, and telehealth – VA researchers in Boston are testing a telehealth intervention to help Veterans who have both posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and hepatitis C. PTSD is linked with poor self-care and non-compliance with drug regimens, so these hepatitis C patients may be at higher medical risk. The study will involve 70 Veterans, half of whom will receive a face-to-face counseling intervention and half a telephone intervention. The study will look at factors such as self-care, emotional distress, motivation to participate in treatment, and overall quality of life over six months. It will also evaluate the cost-effectiveness of each approach.

Identifying barriers to treatment – VA investigators in Pittsburgh and Seattle are exploring why many Veterans with hepatitis C do not initiate or complete the evaluations needed to begin antiviral treatment. The study will follow Veterans referred by their primary care doctors to gastroenterologists for treatment of their hepatitis C. The study will examine factors that may be affecting patients' willingness or ability to move ahead with antiviral therapy. The research will include in-depth interviews exploring patients' knowledge and understanding of the disease and its treatment, as well as issues such as trust and communication in the patient-doctor relationship.

VA website on care, research – Log on to VA's special website on hepatitis C (www.hepatitis.va.gov) to find general information about the condition as well as an overview of VA's efforts in this area. Included are descriptions of VA research sites with special hepatitis C programs: Minneapolis, San Francisco, Seattle/Portland, and West Haven, Conn.

Facts About Hepatitis C

The liver disease hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is spread through contact with infected blood or contaminated IV needles, razors, tattoo tools, or other items. Hepatitis C is particularly prevalent among Veterans, especially those who received blood transfusions prior to 1992. Between 4 and 17 percent of Veterans are infected, compared with 2 percent in the non-Veteran population. Most people with hepatitis C do not have any signs or symptoms of the disease for decades. By the time the disease is diagnosed, there can be significant damage to the liver, leading to complications such as liver cancer and sometimes resulting in death. Treatments using the protein interferon can be effective, but potential side effects such as mood disorders must be managed carefully.

