

Researchers Find New Treatment for Hepatitis C

Researchers at the Oklahoma University Health Sciences Center have found a new use for an old drug. Their findings appear online in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*.

The drug, Fluvastatin, has been approved since 1993 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of elevated cholesterol in adults. Millions of patients have taken Fluvastatin for cholesterol without difficulty.

In a study of 31 veterans at the Veteran's Administration Medical Center in Oklahoma City, researchers found that Fluvastatin significantly lowered the viral load, or levels of hepatitis C virus, for up to six weeks when used alone.

"This research is the first to demonstrate the antiviral activity of Fluvastatin in human beings infected with hepatitis C, most of whom were non-responders to the standard of care treatment," said Ted Bader, M.D., the principle investigator on the project and director of liver diseases at the OU Health Sciences Center.

Since Fluvastatin will not completely clear the hepatitis C virus by itself, researchers have started a phase II randomized, controlled trial that combines Fluvastatin with the standard treatment of peg-interferon and ribavirin. They hope to use the combination of medicines to significantly improve the cure rate for hepatitis C. After further required testing and approval, the drug could be available as a new treatment for hepatitis C far sooner than any other anti-hepatitis C drug currently under research and development.

Nationwide, 2 percent of Americans (about 4 million) are infected with chronic hepatitis C, which is four times the number of patients infected with HIV. Chronic hepatitis C is often asymptomatic and can lead to progressive liver disease.

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