



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 both with the hepatitis C virus and HIV.

Examples of VA research advances

- **Potential treatment for liver scarring**—A study on mice conducted by a team with the San Diego VA and the University of California showed that fibrosis in the liver—a scarring process that can result from hepatitis C and other chronic diseases affecting the liver—may be reversible. The researchers showed that if they blocked a protein linked to overproduction of scar tissue, the progression of fibrosis not only stopped, but previous damage was reversed. The new findings build on earlier work by the same team in which they first identified the protein, called C/EBP beta.
- **New test for liver disease**—A team with Stanford University and the Palo Alto VA took part in a study that confirmed the reliability of a new genetic test to identify patients at high risk for developing cirrhosis of the liver. This condition, an advanced stage of fibrosis, involves severe scarring and hardening of the liver. The new test means that only higher-risk patients could be directed toward more extensive treatments, which can be costly and potentially debilitating. Weekly injections of a commonly used two-drug regimen, for example, can cost more than \$30,000 per year and lead to nausea, depression, and other side effects.
- **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 four VA research sites with special hepatitis C programs: Minneapolis, San Francisco, Seattle/Portland, and West Haven.

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. 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.

