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Hep C may benefit from genetic fingerprinting, research says

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Genetic fingerprinting may predict who will benefit from early hepatitis C treatment and who will clear the virus spontaneously, new research shows.

The way doctors think about hepatitis C treatment is changing, with researchers saying it is now possible to use genotyping to predict which patients are likely to clear the infection spontaneously and which will benefit from early therapy.

A team of UNSW researchers, led by Professor Gregory Dore and Dr. Jason Grebely, has determined that genetic changes near the human IL28B gene - identified recently as linked to the ability to control hepatitis C infection - may also be used to identify those patients with recent infection whose own immune system is likely to clear the virus without therapy.

“The use of human genotyping may change the landscape of how we treat patients with recent HCV infection,” said Dr. Grebely, a lecturer in the Viral Hepatitis and Clinical Research Program at UNSW’s National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (NCHECR).

It’s the first time that patients with early hepatitis C infection, who are likely to clear the virus on their own, might be identified and spared treatment, which is expensive and has side effects, Dr. Grebely said.

“IL28B genetic testing, prior to treatment for HCV infection, is likely to

be incorporated into clinical care to identify those most likely to respond," Dr. Grebely said. "For those patients without the favourable genotype, the doctor can proceed with treatment, knowing it is better to treat early than waiting until the condition has become chronic."

The findings will be published this week in the journal *Hepatology*.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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