

Hope for Hep C cure no excuse for risk-taking, expert warns

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Exciting early indications of a cure for Hepatitis C do not mean we should become complacent about the risks of contracting the debilitating disease, a leading Australian researcher warns.

Professor Geoff McCaughan, head of the Liver Immunobiology Program at Sydney's Centenary Research Institute, says preliminary results of a newly developed oral treatment regime for liver transplant patients with Hepatitis C were showing promising results.

"We are starting to see some dramatic responses with these drugs," says Professor McCaughan, who also heads the liver transplant unit at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

"It's too early to be certain yet, but these drugs potentially can turn around even end-stage [liver disease](#). It's looking like they can stop the Hepatitis C virus occurring after a liver transplant, and they can get rid of the virus in people who are waiting for a transplant.

"At present, people with Hepatitis C have the worst outcomes for patients receiving liver transplants. This could dramatically alter that picture."

Liver diseases, including Hepatitis B and C, have an impact on the Australian economy 40 per cent greater than [chronic kidney disease](#) and Type 2 diabetes combined, resulting in a health burden cost of \$50 billion a year.

And while the newly developed drugs are showing great promise in the treatment of Hepatitis C, prevention rather than cure remains a much better, and much cheaper, option.

"Public health measures in the fields of alcohol abuse and obesity are key strategies in the fight to reduce the burden of liver disease," says Prof McCaughan.

Professor McCaughan's comments came in the run-up to World Hepatitis Day on Sunday, July 28. The WHO sponsored annual event, which began in 2008, aims to raise awareness and funds for research to tackle Hepatitis B and C, which together infect more than 50 million people worldwide.

For those with Hepatitis C, the new oral therapies currently being tested offer a glimmer of hope for an eventual cure.

"This is all very new," says Professor McCaughan. "There are only about 50 people around the world who are receiving these drugs. We have five of them at RPA – they have been enrolled in this study to eradicate the virus before their transplants to avoid the risk of doing badly afterwards."

A follow-up study is planned for later this year, which will see another small group of Australian patients receive the drugs.

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