



Blair Gastro

Gastroenterology Associates

Specializing in Disorders of the Digestive System

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To Whom It May Concern,

As the Hepatitis C treatment program coordinator at Blair Gastroenterology Associates, I am very concerned about the lack of insurance coverage for my patients with active Hepatitis C infections. Unless a Hepatitis C patient has fibrosis score of F3-F4, which means liver cirrhosis, or has liver cancer, or may be on the transplant list, they will be denied treatment for their Hepatitis C virus.

Nearly 4 million people in the USA, 125,000 in Pennsylvania alone, have acute or chronic Hepatitis C. Most people who have an infection don't know it because Hepatitis C often has no symptoms until the damage is severe. Hepatitis C is now curable! The treatment is costly but has few side effects and can eliminate the disease in 12 weeks, sometimes less. The cost and the restrictions placed on treatment by insurance companies have prevented patients from having access to therapy, a cure!

Deferring treatment for Hepatitis C virus infection after diagnosis or until evidence of advanced liver disease may increase liver-related mortality, transmission, cancer, and transplantation. Delaying treatment causes cirrhosis with complications, fibrosis often accelerates with age and duration of infection as it is! Symptoms from Hepatitis C like severe debilitating fatigue, joint and muscle pain, swelling and belly pain, dark urine, itchy skin, shrinkage of muscles, bleeding from enlarged veins in the digestive tract, damage to the brain and nervous system – encephalopathy, can all come prior to F3-F4 levels.

A viable solution is needed to address the limitations placed on available resources to pay for a curative Hepatitis C treatment. All patients, regardless of liver disease stage, should have access to curative treatment. This would allow a reduction in the incidence of end stage liver disease, liver cancer, and need for liver transplant. A greater access to a cure could allow for a decrease in the rate of transmission and ultimately eradicate Hepatitis C.

Our goal should be to find a solution to provide affordable testing, treatment and prevention for Hepatitis C, as well as to save the lives of all Hepatitis C patients living in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Karen Brandt, RN, Hepatitis C Treatment Coordinator

810 Valley View Blvd., Altoona, PA 16602 | 814-946-5469 | www.blairgastro.com

Lance C. DeFrancisco, MD | Ralph D. McKibbin, MD, FACP, FACG | Rajih A. Alkhafaji, MD
Ronald J. Brzana, MD | Edmond J. Bouassaf, MD | David L. Kerstetter Jr., MD | Mitul T. Patel, MD