There Is an Unaddressed Smoking Epidemic Among People With Hep C

According to a recent analysis, smoking in this population is tied to depression and high blood pressure.

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The high rates of smoking among the hepatitis C virus (HCV) population threaten to undermine the beneficial effects of treating the virus, aidsmap reports. And yet there has been little in the way of a concerted effort to encourage people living with the virus to give up cigarettes.

Publishing their findings in the American Journal of Medicine, researchers sought to determine the health effects of smoking among people with hep C by analyzing 1999 to 2014 data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

The study cohort included 43,793 adults, 1.3 percent (524) of whom had HCV. Of that group, 59.6 percent (312) currently smoked. The smoking rate was three times greater among those with hep C compared with those without: A respective 62.4 percent and 22.9 percent of each group smoked.

A total of 87.5 percent of HCV-positive smokers smoked cigarettes daily (as opposed to non-daily), compared with 80 percent of the HCV-negative smokers. However, the two groups had similar levels of actual dependence on cigarettes.

Among smokers, those with hep C, compared with those without the virus, were more likely to be older (with an average age of 47.1 versus 41.5 years), male (69.4 percent versus 54.4 percent), Black (21.2 percent versus 12.1 percent) less educated (31.8 percent versus 42.9 percent had any level of college education), poor (average household income was 180 percent versus 247 percent of federal poverty level), uninsured (43.9 percent versus 30.4 percent), to use drugs (cocaine: 11.1 percent versus 3.2 percent; heroin: 4 percent versus 0.6 percent) and be depressed (33.2 percent versus 13.5 percent).

After adjusting the data for various factors, the study authors found that there were significant associations among the hep C population between cigarette smoking and currently being depressed and having high blood pressure.

“There is a cigarette smoking epidemic embedded within the hepatitis C epidemic in the U.S.,” the

study authors concluded. “The sociodemographic profile of hepatitis C–positive smokers suggests that the implementation of effective tobacco treatment will be challenging. Thoughtful treatment strategies that are mindful of the unique characteristics of this group are needed.”

To read the aidsmap article, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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