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## Welcomed revolution in hepatitis C treatments

People living with hepatitis C can now access new treatments that have exceptionally high cure rates, shorter treatment durations and which also avoid the debilitating side-effects associated with existing therapies.

From 1 March, new drugs - which can cure hepatitis C for 90-95% of people who take them - will be available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for between \$6.20 and \$38.80 per script.

“The arrival of these drugs is game-changing in terms of how we respond to this epidemic in Australia, but above all it will be life-changing for the people who have been living with this illness”, said Professor Amany Zekry, Director of the Department of Gastroenterology at St George Hospital.

230,500 Australians are living with the hepatitis C virus which damages the liver, leading to liver scarring (cirrhosis), liver cancer and liver failure. Each month approximately 250 people with hepatitis C develop serious and potentially life-threatening liver disease or liver cancer.

The new drugs – Sofosbuvir, Sofosbuvir/Ledipasvir and Daclatasvir – have a range of advantages over current treatments, including:

- Much higher cure rates
- A dosage of 12 weeks or less for most people
- Are all-oral, daily pills, avoiding debilitating injections
- Significantly fewer side-effects

“Hepatitis C currently affects more than 1 in 100 people in NSW. It is our hope that the arrival of these new drugs, in combination with ongoing prevention efforts like the Needle and Syringe Program, will finally see hep C prevalence going down,” Professor Zekry said.

Unlike in most comparable countries, access to these treatments will not be restricted based on liver disease stage or treatment history. Additionally, these new treatments will be able to be prescribed by GPs and other medical doctors, in consultation with relevant specialists.

“We all want the best treatment and health outcomes for our patients, and we encourage GPs to work with specialists in hepatitis C to determine appropriate prescribing,” Professor Zekry said.

“I encourage all people living with hepatitis C, whether they were diagnosed three months ago or three decades ago, to see their doctor and start preparing for treatment.”

**Media opportunities:** To arrange an interview with Professor Zekry, please contact Media and Communications Officer Carisa Mitchell on 0411 730 842.

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