

HEALTH UPDATE

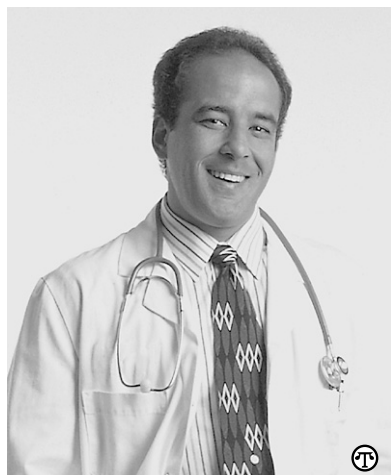
Study Shows Better Treatment For Hepatitis C Sufferers

(NAPSA)—There's an exciting new development in the battle against hepatitis C—a blood-borne virus that affects almost three million Americans. A new study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reports that combination therapy of ribavirin with a once-weekly form of interferon called PEGASYS® (pegylated interferon alfa-2a) is better tolerated and more effective in treating hepatitis C patients than standard interferon combination therapy taken three times per week.

Hepatitis C is a serious disease that is complicated to treat. There are about six different types of hepatitis C in the United States, and approximately 70 percent of hepatitis C patients are infected with the most common and difficult form of the virus to treat, known as genotype 1. This new study, however, shows that patients who are infected with genotype 1 had a significant increase in response with the combination therapy of PEGASYS.

"Sixty-five percent of patients in the study were infected with hepatitis C genotype 1, the most prevalent genotype we see here in the United States, and typically hardest to treat," said study author Dr. Michael Fried, Director of Clinical Hepatology at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Medicine. "This is the most significant research we've found that suggests these patients might benefit by taking Pegasys in combination with ribavirin."

The study was also the first published in which a pegylated interferon combination therapy was found to have a lower occurrence of side effects such as depression and flu-like symptoms (chills, headache, fever) compared to standard interferon and ribavirin therapy. The most common



side effects seen in the Pegasys trials have included flu-like symptoms, injection site reactions, partial alopecia, or hair loss, abdominal pain, depression, irritability, insomnia, dizziness and loss of appetite.

"The side effects of therapy can be very challenging for patients," said Dr. Fried. "The study shows an approach that can enable patients to have a better response to therapy without increases in some of the most common and difficult-to-tolerate side effects associated with hepatitis C therapy."

The study also found that patient response to Pegasys combination therapy is predictable. This means patients who responded to treatment after only three months had a higher likelihood of clearing the virus from their blood at the end of the year-long therapy. This information can be used to encourage patients to remain on therapy. On the other hand, patients who did not respond at the three-month mark were very unlikely to clear the virus. For these patients, alternative options for managing their hepatitis C could be explored with their doctor.