



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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**U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION APPROVES NEW DRUG TO CURE  
HEPATITIS C**

**HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HOLDS VIRAL HEPATITIS SYMPOSIUM TO  
INCREASE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS' KNOWLEDGE OF TREATMENT  
OPTIONS FOR PATIENTS**

HONOLULU – The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new “breakthrough” drug to treat chronic hepatitis C earlier this month that has a cure rate as high as 95 percent. Viral hepatitis B and C are the leading cause of liver cancer, and Hawaii has the highest rate of liver cancer in the United States.

The FDA designates a drug as a breakthrough therapy if preliminary clinical evidence indicates the drug demonstrates a substantial improvement over available therapies for patients with serious or life-threatening diseases.

In Hawaii, an estimated 23,000 people are affected by the hepatitis C virus, especially baby boomers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that nationwide more than 75 percent of adults living with hepatitis C are baby boomers born between 1945 and 1965. The CDC estimates more than 121,000 deaths could be averted nationwide by screening and successfully treating hepatitis C among baby boomers.

Hepatitis C is a viral disease that causes inflammation of the liver that can lead to diminished liver function or liver failure. Most people infected with hepatitis C have no symptoms of the disease until liver damage becomes apparent, which may take decades.

Some people with chronic hepatitis C infection develop scarring and poor liver function or cirrhosis over many years, which can lead to complications such as bleeding, jaundice (yellowish eyes or skin), fluid accumulation in the abdomen, infections and liver cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 3.2 million Americans are infected with hepatitis C, and without proper treatment, 15 to 30 percent of these people will go on to develop cirrhosis.

### **Symposium: Increasing Healthcare Provider Capacity**

“Hepatitis C may be the first completely curable virus, but the challenge is now making sure healthcare providers have the capabilities to treat those with hepatitis,” said Thaddeus Pham, viral hepatitis prevention coordinator with the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH)..

DOH is partnering with the Hepatitis Support Network of Hawaii, Hep Free Hawaii, and other local agencies to host “Viral Hepatitis Hawai‘i – Update 2014,” a symposium intended to provide physicians and other healthcare professionals with the latest research on the changing state of hepatitis treatment and care.

The educational conference for medical professionals, social service providers, and community members will include updates from local and national experts about hepatitis B and C diagnosis and treatment, hepatitis during pregnancy, and new drug therapies and research from the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases.

“As more effective hepatitis treatments become available and as more people receive access to affordable insurance, it is important that both the general public and the medical community in Hawaii become aware of how to treat hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C,” said Pham, who is helping to plan the upcoming symposium. “This symposium will help Hawaii’s medical community and other participants to learn about how this disease affects our ohana and what we can do about it.”

### **Registration for All-Day Hepatitis Symposium**

The symposium will be held on Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014 at the Queen’s Conference Center from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It will include general sessions and smaller breakout sessions, exhibits, continental breakfast and lunch (brochure attached). Continuing education credits for physicians, social workers, and certified substance abuse counselors will be available.

Online registration is available at [www.virahhephi.org](http://www.virahhephi.org).

For more information about hepatitis resources and events in Hawaii, go to [www.hepfreehawaii.org](http://www.hepfreehawaii.org)

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