

Hepatitis drug fails to cure patients

By Zulfiqar Memon

NAWABSHAH, Nov 9: A large number of Hepatitis-C patients after completing six-month Interferon therapy were declared positive allegedly due to use of substandard drug and the health official's failure to maintain cold chain for vaccine, Dawn has learnt.

Figures provided by the medical superintendent of Peoples Medical College Hospital showed that initially 24 patients registered with the EDO health office completed six-month Interferon therapy treatment.

But it was shocking that out of the 24 patients, 20 were declared positive with the deadly disease after PCR test at PMC Diagnostic Laboratory.

In the second phase, 72 patients out of the 84 patients who completed their therapy were declared Hepatitis C positive.

Similarly, a large number of cases were declared positive in Naushahro Feroze, Sanghar, Matiari, Khairpur, Dadu and other districts of Sindh after completion of treatment.

Professor of Medicine and Incharge Medical Unit-I at PMC Hospital Dr Abdul Qayoom Memon said that the drug being used in therapy treatment of Hepatitis-C patients was substandard. He said that no consultant was satisfied with its results and the patients would have to use another therapy to get rid of that fatal disease.

He said that there was a doubt that the people involved in distribution and procurement had failed to maintain cold chain for vaccine.

Associate Professor and incharge Medical Unit-III Dr Mohammed Saleem Faiz said that the failure of drug (therapy treatment) would worsen the condition of patients and the virus would not respond to formal anti-virus therapy.

He said that either the sub standard drug was used in the therapy course or the cold chain was not maintained by the procurement officials.

He also said that Hepatitis-C positive patients after completion of six-months course would have to take another treatment which cost Rs500,000 to Rs600,000 to each patient.

Medical Superintendent of the PMC Hospital Dr Naseer Shaikh, when contacted, said that the matter had been reported to high-ups and the elected representatives.

He said an inquiry had already been initiated and a team of professors would soon visit Shaheed Benazirabad.

Executive District Officer (health) Shaheed Benazirabad Dr Bahadur Khoro was not available for comments.

But DO Health Dr Saadullah Qureshi told this scribe that the reports had already been sent to the high-ups and they were waiting for results.

When contacted, EDO (health) of Naushahro Feroze Dr Mazhar Hussain Hisbani said that hundreds of patients who had completed the therapy failed to respond it, but he could not provide details due to absence of the official concerned.

Dr Majeed Chhutto, programme manager at Hyderabad, strongly defended his position as well as efficacy of Interferon being provided to EDOs health all over Sindh.

He said that an inquiry had been initiated into the matter. But it was a conspiracy being hatched against the programme, he said and added that results of various districts of Sindh received by his office were good and average 75 per cent patients were found negative after the completion of course.

He alleged that there was a problem with cold chain maintenance at Shaheed Benazirabad or in the pathology laboratory where the PCR were being conducted because other results were contrary to them.

Professor Anwar Ali Akhund, Vice-Principal PMC and Incharge Pathology Laboratory said that the diagnostic lab was equipped with latest machinery and a senior competent pathologist was performing duty at the lab.

The problem could be due to non maintenance of cold chain by the distributors and procurement places, he said.

Dr Ghulam Mustafa Jamali, former incharge Hepatic Clinic of the PMC Hospital, said that the reason of his resignation was also the ineffectiveness and non-efficacy of the drug.

He said that the Hepatic clinic was being run properly and all the data was being maintained. But he was disappointed after getting the poor results. He urged the officials concerned for immediate change of the brand of the medicine.

He said that the PCR test cost Rs4,000 in private labs and Rs2,000 in those belonging to the government. Each and every patient could not afford to go for PCR before and after

therapy, he said.

Average 20-25 patients die in PMC and other hospitals of the district every month due to the complications of Hepatitis i.e. Cirrhosis or Hepatic coma as they reach hospitals after treatment from quacks operating freely throughout the district without any check by the EDO Health.

Several programmes were launched for vaccination and treatment of diseases, but the health department has not so far taken any serious notice or launched any effective campaign for awareness of people or preventing the spread of the deadly disease.