For many people with chronic hepatitis B, the cost of antiviral medications is a major barrier to treatment. Even those who have prescription coverage can face co-pays that put medication out of reach.

While U.S. health insurance plans must cover people living with hepatitis B, many plans place hepatitis B medications in a category that dramatically increases the co-pays for those drugs. Although current laws protect individuals with pre-existing conditions including hepatitis B, from discriminatory practices by health insurance companies, these prescription pricing practices have effectively made many insurance plans unaffordable for people living with hepatitis B.

When health insurers design plans, they assign each prescription drug to a price “tier.” A low-cost generic antibiotic may be a Tier 1 while a new, brand-name drug is assigned to a pricier Tier 4 or 5. The Hepatitis B Foundation recently reviewed hepatitis B prescription coverage for Silver-Level Qualified Health Plans sold through Florida’s 2018 healthcare marketplace. Our research revealed that common hepatitis B medications were placed on the highest two tiers in the majority of the plans. These tiers typically required patients to meet deductibles between $2,500 and $6,750 before allowing cost-sharing benefits for any hepatitis B drugs, even generics. This over-pricing of certain drugs by placing them in a higher tier, called “adverse tiering,” acts as a deterrent for people with chronic conditions from buying a health plan, and can be considered discriminatory against pre-existing conditions.

To fight these practices, The AIDS Institute and the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) filed complaints in Florida against insurance companies that inflated their HIV drug prices through “adverse tiering” to discourage people living with HIV from buying their plans. The complaint was based on Florida Qualified Health Plans available in 2014 and 2015, and found that four of the insurance plans they reviewed placed all HIV drugs on the highest tier, leading to inordinately high co-payments and co-insurance for medications used in the treatment of HIV and AIDS. The practice was found to be discriminatory by the Department of Health and Human Service’s Office for Civil Rights. The insurers were fined and the drug tiers for HIV drugs were revised to be more affordable, but this “adverse tiering” persists nationwide for hepatitis B and C drugs.

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Hepatitis B Foundation and Baruch S. Blumberg Institute
Name New Vice Presidents for Research Affairs, Institutional Advancement, and Public Health and Programs

The Hepatitis B Foundation and the Baruch S. Blumberg Institute are pleased to announce that Joa Tan Go, MD has been named vice president, research affairs, Jean Holmes, MBA has joined the organization as vice president, institutional advancement, and Charli Cohen, DrPH, MBA has been named vice president, public health and programs.

In his new position, Dr. Guo will oversee all research undertaken by scientists at the Blumberg Institute. Dr. Guo has served as the W. Thomas London Distinguished Professor and Chairman of Department of Experimental Therapeutics at Baruch S. Blumberg Institute since 2015. He received medical training in Lanzhou University School of Medicine in China and postdoctoral training with Dr. Christoph Seeger at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia. Dr. Guo established his research laboratory in 2004 in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at LaSalle University College of Medicine. Dr. Guo has been working on the molecular pathogenesis and antiviral research of hepatitis viruses, flaviviruses and human coronaviruses for the past thirty years.

Jean Holmes, MBA, joined the organization as vice president, institutional advancement, in April 2018. In her new role, she oversees development and marketing and events for the Hepatitis B Foundation, Baruch S. Blumberg Institute, and the Pennsylvania Biotechnology Center. Most recently, she was at the Bucks County Community College Foundation for 13 years, during which she built the college’s major gifts, corporate grants, annual fund, and donor relations programs. She has been deeply involved as a volunteer in her community, serving on numerous committees with the United Way, Bucks Chamber of Commerce and Greater BucksMont Chamber of Commerce, and currently serves on the board of directors for the Youth Orchestra of Bucks County. A member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals since 2005, she has participated with them as a mentor and has been a conference presenter for the Nonprofit Center at LaSalle.

As vice president, public health and programs, Dr. Cohen will be responsible for building and expanding programs designed to promote disease awareness, and support immunization and treatment efforts, ultimately improving the quality of life for those affected by hepatitis B worldwide.

Dr. Cohen has been with the Hepatitis B Foundation for 17 years, during which she has planned, implemented and evaluated community programs and research projects focusing on hepatitis B and liver cancer. Her research focuses on reducing hepatitis B related health disparities, including developing culturally competent models for improving health care access. She is co-founder and director of Hep B United Philadelphia, and chair of CHIPO: Coalition Against Hepatitis Inequity for People of African Origin. She sits on the steering committee for NVHR, the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, and serves as Policy Chair for the Asian Pacific Islander Caucus of the American Public Health Association.

In 2016, the Hepatitis B Foundation launched the Hepatitis B Cure Campaign to capitalize on increased national international momentum around hepatitis B and to sharpen the focus on finding a cure. Our goal is to make the elimination of hepatitis B by 2030 a national health priority. Since the program was launched two years ago, substantial progress has been made, with several major accomplishments that are moving us closer to our goal.

We established a presence in Washington DC, which has helped us to develop new HBV advocacy leaders on Capitol Hill, conduct advocacy training and meetings with 38 congressional offices, secure strong appropriations report language from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Department of Defense (DOD), and meet with NIH leaders to identify ways to accelerate the pace of discoveries related to hepatitis B and liver cancer.

Our research uncovered additional barriers to hepatitis B treatment. In addition to these financial barriers, when hepatitis B treatments and other drugs are priced on high tiers, this often requires prior authorization, quantity limits, or the use of specialty pharmacies, which further discourage users from accessing treatment. In the case of Florida, area coverage also poses an issue. In 21 of the 67 counties in Florida, Blue Cross Blue Shield is the only carrier offering coverage. In an additional 22 counties, only two carriers offer coverage. Thus, while some plans offer better coverage and cost-sharing for specific medications, patients have a limited ability to choose the best plan for their needs.

The Hepatitis B Foundation is working to change these practices for hepatitis B medications, but we need your help to gather data and document cases to identify areas where we can be most effective at changing policy. Many are having difficulty affording their hepatitis B medication are encouraged to contact the Foundation at 215-499-4900 or via email at info@hepb.org to share their story.

In October 2018, the Liver Illness Visibility, Education, and Research (LIVER) Act was introduced by Rep. Nedly Velazquez (D-NY) to direct the National Cancer Institute to create new funding opportunities for liver cancer and to make hospitals and healthcare facilities eligible to receive new funding for experimental treatment and prevention programs. The bill also creates a new free drug program, Hepatitis B Cure Campaign Grows Momentum

Who can file a complaint?
Anyone can file a complaint at any time. You do not have to be a hepatitis B patient or a purchaser/holder of the insurance plan to file an administrative complaint with your state bureau of insurance or the federal civil rights office.

How do I file the complaint?
Each state’s Bureau of Insurance website should have a portal for filing a complaint. Usually you can copy and paste the completed complaint into a form on the website, or you can email the complaint to the bureau of insurance.

For detailed instructions on researching pricing and filing a complaint, visit www.hepb.org/overpricing or email info@hepb.org.

Improved Patient Access, continued…

Hep B Cure Campaign Grows Momentum

Act was introduced by Rep. Nedly Velazquez (D-NY) to direct the National Cancer Institute to create new funding opportunities for liver cancer and to make hospitals and healthcare facilities eligible to receive new funding for experimental treatment and prevention programs. The bill also creates a new free drug program; one for liver cancer prevention activities and another for awareness activities targeted to Americans in communities at higher risk.

To help the program continue to build momentum, the Hepatitis B Foundation initiated a new Hepatitis B Cure Campaign (HBCC) Partnership program to promote increased public-sector investment in hepatitis B and liver cancer research. With increased partnerships and expansion of advocacy efforts to secure research funding, we believe that the elimination of hepatitis B is within our reach.
**Hepatitis B Foundation to Provide Resources for African Immigrant Communities**

The Hepatitis B Foundation, in collaboration with the CDC Division of Viral Hepatitis, is excited to announce the creation of a collection of hepatitis B educational resources for African immigrant communities that will be released in early 2019. These will be the first nationally available resources created for African immigrants and will serve an unmet need to raise awareness and promote testing for hepatitis B, which is estimated to affect 5-18% of African immigrant communities in the U.S.

Working with an expert advisory board of community health workers, clinicians, scholars and community members, HBF conducted an assessment of current hepatitis B knowledge, barriers to accessing testing and care, and strategies to address current gaps. The data we collected was used to inform the creation of culturally-relevant resources. The materials will be pilot-tested in multiple communities and will include a self-teach audio-visual module for educators, a picture-based flipchart for direct community education, and a comprehensive resource toolkit. Future expansion for the project will focus on dissemination of the materials, media advertising and community outreach. Subscribe to our e-newsletter for news and updates on these materials!
Su Wang, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Center for Asian Health
Saint Barnabas Medical Center
Board Member, Hepatitis B Foundation

When Dr. Su Wang moved to New Jersey from New York City, she noticed something unusual about the way local patients sought care.

“New Jersey just hadn’t been tapped into as much and yet it is so diverse. It’s the fourth highest Asian population in the US,” she says. “My passion was hepatitis B, so I got grants to do some screenings. We’re really trying to do prevention and true population health, which means not just treating people who are sick, but really trying to keep people from getting sick. That’s where I think the public health thing that I do is helpful,” she says. “Because for her, the screening and early treatment all helps keep people healthy.”

Dr. Wang’s interest in public health began during her medical training at University of Miami. After her residency, she did two years as a public health fellow with Centers for Disease Control, then began searching for a clinical position. That search landed her a job at the Charles B Wang Community Health Center in New York City (CBWCHC). The Center’s patient population had a high prevalence of hepatitis B, and Dr. Wang quickly learned how to treat the patients who came to her.

“Treating hepatitis B was not something I learned during residency, but CBWCHC was one of the pioneers of starting training [primary care] doctors to treat hep B. It is especially important training for doctors who treat a population of people with high prevalence,” she continued. “It’s a way for a physician to respond to a need in their own community. Sometimes seeing a specialist is a barrier, and primary care doctors who see high risk patients should be able to offer care.”

The 2018 Hep B United Summit attracted over 80 attendees from 50 organizations to the event in Washington, DC.

Sixth Annual Hep B United Summit Focuses on Achieving Health Equity

The 6th Annual Hep B United National Summit was held in Washington, D.C. on July 24-26, 2018 – just a few days before World Hepatitis Day on July 28. Approximately 80 people from 50 organizations, campaigns, and coalitions from around the United States joined Hep B United (HBU) to learn more about the current state of hepatitis B and to advocate for increased support and prioritization from the federal government.

The Summit provides federal, state, and community-based organizations with the opportunity to join forces and share their expertise and knowledge. The collaborative work that is done at the Summit provides momentum for the health equity to End Hepatitis B, and for the growth of new ideas and plans of action on both a community and organizational level. Each annual Summit advances our movement to effectively address hepatitis B, reflect on recent successes, and move the community one step closer to eliminating hepatitis B.

The 2018 summit theme was Achieving health equity to End Hepatitis B, with sessions that addressed expanding hepatitis B screenings in high-risk communities, combating stigma and discrimination, disparities in hepatitis B medication pricing, and preventing perinatal transmission.

The day before the Summit began, attendees participated in a hepatitis B advocacy day on Capitol Hill. More than 65 participants were able to meet with 61 Congressional offices in just under four hours! Advocates shared their personal experiences with hepatitis B and asked their representatives to support funding for expanded hepatitis B surveillance and prevention programs, funding towards accelerating research to find a cure for hepatitis B and improving treatment options, and improved resources to increase vaccination rates among adults.

On Wednesday, July 25, Senator Mazie Hirono from Hawaii, and Representatives Judy Chu from California’s 27th district, Hank Johnson from Georgia’s 4th district, and Brian Fitzpatrick from Pennsylvania’s 8th district joined a Congressional reception hosted by the Hepatitis B Foundation to recognize community and Congressional Hep B Champions. Dr. Matthew Lin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health, shared remarks on the Department of Health and Human Services’ commitment to eliminating hepatitis B. Senator Hirono was presented with the first annual Hepatitis B Congressional Champion Award for her dedication to elevating hepatitis B research at a national level; Arman Altug from the Hepatitis Education Project, the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, and Kenson and Rensely Alik from Hep Free Hawaii and the #justB storytelling campaign were also recognized for the work that they’ve done to address hepatitis B in their communities.

Established by the Hepatitis B Foundation and AAPCHO in 2012, Hep B United now has more than 30 local coalitions across 26 cities in 19 states and the District of Columbia, all with the goal of promoting screening, vaccination, and linkage to care to eliminate hepatitis B.

These stories were created to provide information and raise awareness about hepatitis B issues in the United States and globally. We invite others to use the videos as a tool to educate audiences about screening and prevention, and advocate for increased attention to the virus within the health professions and broader medical community. To help facilitate discussion, a newly updated Discussion Guide is available to prepare presenters to lead discussions about the experiences presented in the videos. To view the new videos and download the newly updated Discussion Guide, visit www.hepb.org/justb.
Hepatitis B Foundation Boards Add Two New Members

The Hepatitis B Foundation is pleased to announce the addition of David A. Gruber, CPA to its Board of Directors, and Anna Lok, MD to its Scientific and Medical Advisory Board.

Mr. Gruber is a certified public accountant with over 40 years of experience in nonprofit accounting. He currently provides financial, business, and consulting services through his company, Gruber Administrative Services, and serves as trustee for several family trusts. He is a member of both the American and Pennsylvania Institutes of Certified Public Accountants and is active on several nonprofit boards. He joined the HBF Board of Directors in August.

Dr. Lok is an internationally renowned hepatologist with a more than 30 year career focused on the natural history and treatment of hepatitis B and C. She is the Alice Lohrmann Andrews Research Professor in Hepatology at the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Michigan Health System. Her research has been supported by federal grants from the Veterans Health Administration and the National Institutes of Health. She has published more than 350 articles, reviews, editorials, and book chapters.

Calendar of Events

2019

Feb 20-24
APASL 2019
Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver
Manila, Philippines
apasl2019manila.org

March 8-9
EASL-AASLD HBV Endpoints Meeting
European Association for the Study of the Liver and American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
London, UK
easl.eu

April 10-14
International Liver Congress
European Association for the Study of the Liver
Vienna, Austria
easl.eu

April 26
2019 Crystal Ball Gala
Hepatitis B Foundation
Blue Bell, PA, USA
hepb.org

May 19
National Hepatitis Testing Day
United States CDC
Events around the country
cdc.gov/hepatitis/testingday

July 28
World Hepatitis Day
WHO and WHA
Events around the world
worldhepatitisday.org

October 1-4
2019 International HBV Meeting
Hepatitis B Foundation
Melbourne, Australia
HBVmeeting.org

For More Information About Hepatitis B Foundation Programs
- HBV Info & Support List ... HBLIST.net
- HBV Clinical Trials ... hep.org/clinicaltrials
- HBV Drug Watch ... hep.org/drugwatch
- Hepatitis Delta Connect ... hepDconnect.org
- Liver Cancer Connect ... livercancerconnect.org