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Alliance Ukraine secures affordable life-saving Hepatitis C treatment for people living with HIV

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine has reached an agreement with MSD, one of the world's leading pharmaceutical producers, to more than halve the cost of a 48 week treatment course for Hepatitis C for its project in Ukraine.

Such a substantial price reduction – from \$13,200 down to \$5000 – will enable Alliance Ukraine to secure Hepatitis C (HCV) treatment for 100 highly vulnerable patients with HIV/HCV co-infection through the procurement of Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin – two key components of the treatment course.

This important HCV treatment initiative is funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and means that the first patients will be enrolled into HCV treatment in Ukraine in early November 2013.

According to Andriy Klepikov, Alliance Ukraine's Executive Director: *"We have managed to overcome the key obstacle when it comes to accessing Hepatitis C treatment – the price. This project should now become a catalyst for change in Ukraine and the wider region."*

He continued: *"We are delighted to announce this partnership, which brings together the international donor community, NGO and private sectors, as well as government and patient organizations in a promising new collaboration."*

There is a dramatic unmet need in Hepatitis C treatment, both globally and in Ukraine. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Hepatitis C kills 350,000 people per year, and some 150 million have the chronic form of the virus. Ukraine has the highest HCV prevalence in Europe, with the number of people infected as high as 1.2 million. Hepatitis C is called the "hidden epidemic" and high treatment cost has historically been the main reason why national governments and international donors have failed to invest in this public health issue.

Whilst treatment costs for HIV have reduced significantly over the past 10 years - resulting in eight million people on antiretroviral treatment (ART) globally - this new dramatic reduction in HCV treatment costs presents a real breakthrough and opens the door for hundreds of people who are co-infected with HCV and HIV.

Under the terms of the new partnership, people living with HIV who are co-infected with Hepatitis C will be eligible for treatment in six regions of Ukraine: Kyiv, Poltava, Sumy, Vinnitsa, Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolayiv. Local non-governmental organizations will provide simultaneous support for patients under the overall coordination of State Service of Ukraine on HIV/AIDS and Other Socially Dangerous Diseases, and Ukrainian Center for Socially Dangerous Disease Control under the Ministry of Health of Ukraine.

"I'm one of the many Ukrainians for whom this treatment will save life, - said Vlad Deineka who has been waiting for HCV treatment for more than 10 years. - It's a real chance for me to survive."

The treatment initiative correlates with the newly approved National programme for combating the spread of viral hepatitis. Earlier this month, Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved the long-awaited programme for 2013-2016 to which the Ukrainian government intends to allocate over \$ 4.2 million for 2013 that is less than 10% of the amount envisaged for treatment in the programme with no vulnerable groups specified. Under such circumstances, the special price negotiated by Alliance Ukraine will give hope to hundreds of other patients in Ukraine.

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Alliance Ukraine, with the support of the Global Fund, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, the Open Society Foundation and the International Renaissance Foundation, has been advocating for lower prices and greater access to HCV treatment since 2011. Due to the limited competition between the manufacturers of efficient hepatitis C medicines, the treatment cost remains high. The treatment in Ukraine costs \$12,000 – \$14,000 which is unaffordable for the majority of citizens. The price of governmental procurement of Hepatitis C treatment in the Russian Federation and several other countries in the region varies from \$12,000 to \$17,000.