

26 May 2015

Contact person:

Olena Deineka,

tel. +38 (044) 490 5485 (ext. 235)

deineka@aid alliance.org.ua

Press Release

The Cutting Edge Drug to Treat Patients with Hepatitis C is Finally in Ukraine

Thanks to the procurement of sofosbuvir – the innovative direct-acting antiviral to treat hepatitis C virus (HCV) – by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine, in several days the first patients will start their long-awaited treatment. This procurement was conducted within the [new pilot program of HCV treatment](#) for over 1,500 patients, including those with HIV/HCV co-infection, people who use drugs and members of other key populations, funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

However, Alliance-Ukraine underlines that the number of patients in need of such treatment is much bigger, so the vital role here belongs to the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Ukraine, which only started its negotiations with the [manufacturing company](#) on registration of sofosbuvir and establishment of procurement price for the drug within the state viral hepatitis program.

Currently, the price proposed by the pharmaceutical company to the MoH is unknown, but Alliance Ukraine hopes that it will be based on the lowest price for sofosbuvir registered in the world – \$900 for 12-week treatment course, which is the price paid by Alliance Ukraine to procure this drug ([similarly to the procurement of peg-interferons and ribavirin courses](#) in 2013, when the low price was achieved first by Alliance Ukraine and then by the MoH).

At the same time, Alliance Ukraine considers that the procurement price of the MoH may and should be much lower than \$900 per treatment course, as according to Andrew Hill, PhD, Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics at the University of Liverpool, [the cost of Sofosbuvir production is much lower](#). It is especially important for our country now, in the times of economic crisis, taking into account significant needs in modern courses of HCV treatment (only based on the data of the World Health Organization, 3 to 7% of people living in Ukraine are infected with HCV, which makes 1.3 to 3 million people) as well as growth in the number of new infections at the East of the country in the areas of anti-terrorist operation.

Reduction of prices for the drugs will play a critical role in scaling up access to treatment of hepatitis C in Ukraine, that is why all possible legal means should be used to ensure access to treatment for those who need it, in particular to ensure competition on the market of proper-quality generic drugs, which may lead to the drop in prices and will make this treatment available to all patients.

Now it is the turn of the MoH – if HCV treatment in Ukraine becomes available to all those who need it, will depend on the results of further negotiations, terms of sofosbuvir registration, and its introduction into the national HCV treatment protocol.

As for Alliance Ukraine, it makes all efforts to scale up access to HCV treatment within the [Demanding treatment!](#) advocacy campaign and the [Healthy Country Project](#), through screening programs for most-at-risk groups and general population, awareness-raising campaigns, community mobilization, advocacy for price reduction in diagnosis and treatment, in particular using new direct-acting antiviral agents and [directly through the implementation of treatment programs](#) and integration of HCV prevention and treatment services into harm reduction programs.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 185 million people in the world live with the hepatitis C virus. Eastern Europe and Central Asia combined account for approximately 9.1 million people living with hepatitis C. The epidemic in many countries of the region has strongly affected marginalized populations, such as people who use drugs.

Sofosbuvir is a new direct-acting antiviral drug for treating HCV from the class of polymerase inhibitors. It is part of the preferred HCV treatment regimens according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization and European and American Associations for the Study of the Liver Diseases (EASL and AASLD).

[The International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine](#) is the largest civil society organisation in Ukraine and EECA region working on HIV, HCV and TB to prevent spread of the diseases among key populations and providing integrated prevention and treatment services to over 270,000 clients, the most vulnerable to and affected by the epidemics.

Since 2011, Alliance Ukraine together with partner organizations advocates for HCV treatment within all-Ukrainian campaign "Demanding Treatment!" This campaign allowed creating all-Ukrainian network of advocates and NGOs working in the area of HCV; integrating HCV prevention and treatment services into harm reduction programs, adopting the [National Targeted Social Program of Viral Hepatitis Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment up to 2016](#) as well as 15 oblast programs, approving the Unified Clinical Protocol of Primary and Secondary (Specialized) Medical Care for Adults and Children "Viral Hepatitis C" and modifying the clinical guide on HCV; reducing the UAH price of HCV diagnosis two times; reducing the price of HCV treatment courses using peg-interferons and ribavirin two and a half times; as a result, in 2013-2014 130 HIV/HCV patients (on OST) received treatment courses using peg-interferon and ribavirin within Alliance Ukraine pilot HCV treatment programs; in 2015 Alliance Ukraine managed achieving price reduction for sofosbuvir treatment, which allowed procuring first 250 treatment courses for the patients with HIV/HCV co-infection.

Recently established Alliance Practice Center on Drug Use and Hepatitis hosted by Alliance Ukraine focuses on HIV and hepatitis response programs for people who inject drugs; techniques to improve key populations outreach, client coverage and retention, ART cascade; program design, management, monitoring and evaluation, and implementation science.