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CHINESE NEWS

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HEADLINE: new drug combination fights hepatitis c

ribavirin
+
interferon

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people infected with hepatitis c may have a better chance of a cure after researchers in canada discovered a new combination of drugs to treat the disease. according to this week's new england journal of medicine, six months after treatment, patients who received the two-drug combination were more likely to be free of hepatitis c than they would be if they accepted the traditional drug treatment of interferon. "this is a major advance in the treatment of hepatitis c," said morris sherman, an assistant professor in medicine at the university of toronto. "prior to these studies the success rate for treatment was somewhere around 15 to 20 percent. with these drugs, with the combination, it is now approximately 40 percent." the key drug involved --known as ribavirin --has not been approved for official use in canada, but it is available throughout the country. the traditional drug, interferon, approved in canada in 1991, has helped in 40 percent of the cases, but the benefits are generally not long lasting as less than 15 percent of the patients achieve complete remission after the treatment. as part of an international group of researchers from the united states, australia, greece and canada, dr. sherman conducted his study with 832 patients in canada. six months after treatment, 43 percent of those who undergone 48 weeks of combination therapy had undetectable levels of the virus, compared to 19 percent of those on interferon alone. about 250,000 canadians are infected with hepatitis c, a blood-borne virus spread in the same way as aids.

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