

Hep B market growth to 2024 limited by low diagnosis and treatment rates

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Hepatitis

The global hepatitis B market, which is set to experience limited growth from \$2.4 billion in 2014 to \$3 billion by 2024, is being stymied by the persistence of low diagnosis and treatment rates, according to research and consulting firm GlobalData.

The company's report identifies a number of factors that negatively impact hepatitis B treatment uptake, including the lack of an effective universal screening program for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection, the low awareness of the disease prevalence among the general public and physicians, and the high cost of effective treatments.

Dr Daian Cheng, GlobalData's Analyst covering Infectious Diseases, explains: "A significant reason why hepatitis B goes undetected in so many infected adults is the fact that most of them present as asymptomatic until the appearance of severe liver damage, such as fibrosis and cirrhosis.

"This problem is exacerbated by the fact that there is no active universal screening program for chronic hepatitis B, and physicians may not always think of testing for this infection. As a result, the detection of hepatitis B relies largely on individuals, which is challenging when people are uneducated about the disease. Negative stigma and other societal barriers further complicate diagnosis.

"While management guidelines for chronic hepatitis B recommend screening for the virus in high-risk populations, such as migrants from countries with high disease prevalence, the identification of new patients remains difficult."

The cost of medical care can be a barrier to treatment access, particularly for low-income populations, which represent a substantial proportion of people living with chronic hepatitis B. In addition to the lack of ability to pay for treatment independently, these populations also tend to be poorly covered by medical insurance, and are reluctant to seek treatment.

In addition, more affordable generic products of older antivirals, such as Epivir-HBV (lamivudine), are much more popular than newer branded drugs, but bear the heavy price of very high viral resistance.

Dr Cheng notes: "Despite the high incentive among experts interviewed for this report to improve the efforts of identifying new patients and applying them with the most effective and safest drugs available, social changes will certainly be crucial to the

improvement in diagnosis and treatment rates of chronic hepatitis B."