



ATLANTIC GASTROENTEROLOGY ASSOCIATES, P.A.
Hepatitis Treatment Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**New Drug Combo Offers Hope for Hepatitis C Patients,
Says Atlantic Gastroenterology Associates**

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, N.J. – Patients who don't respond to standard treatment for Hepatitis C may benefit from a new combination of investigational drugs, announced physicians at the Atlantic Gastroenterology Associates (AGA) Hepatitis Treatment Center. They cited a landmark study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on January 19, 2012 that showed the regimen successfully cleared the virus from the majority of patients, even 12 weeks after treatment ended.

“The study followed patients who were among the most difficult to treat,” explained John J. Santoro, D.O., F.A.C.G, F.A.C.O.I, A.G.A.F., director and researcher at the AGA Hepatitis Treatment Center. “They were not responding well to traditional treatment, and yet this approach was highly successful. We believe it will be an approach that we'll be able to use with all of our patients with Hep C.”

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis C is almost always chronic and is spread from person to person only by direct contact with an infected person's blood. Traditionally, treatment includes injections with interferon alpha, an antiviral drug known for its serious side effects. Interferon alpha is not well tolerated by many patients and often prompts flu-like symptoms, fatigue, fever and depression.

The study, sponsored by Bristol-Myers Squibb, tracked 21 patients with Hepatitis C for 24 weeks. Ten patients received the standard treatment for Hepatitis C plus two investigational drugs. Eleven patients received just the two investigational drugs. All patients on the four-drug regimen had undetectable levels of Hepatitis C in their blood. Four patients in the two-drug group also had undetectable levels. Side effects included headache, diarrhea, nausea and fatigue.

“This suggests an interferon-free regimen is possible,” said Santoro. “The study has enormous implications for the future treatment of Hepatitis C. We'll be able to treat many more patients, more effectively and with fewer side effects.”

The AGA Hepatitis Treatment Center provides chronic Hepatitis B and C patients with excellence in patient care through its experienced, compassionate medical team and their commitment to ongoing research into improved treatments. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can lead to chronic liver disease (cirrhosis) and liver cancer. These are the leading reasons for liver transplant in the United States.

While Hepatitis B is preventable with a vaccine, Hepatitis C is not. An estimated four million people in the United States are infected with Hepatitis C. Approximately 70 percent of people who are infected with Hepatitis C do not even know they have the disease because they have no symptoms that lead to diagnosis. In fact, when symptoms do appear, it's not uncommon for the disease to be in an advanced stage.

The Hepatitis Treatment Center through its participation with AGA Clinical Research Associates is currently participating in five clinical trials studying other treatments for Hepatitis C. Physicians at AGA have been in the forefront of research for chronic Hepatitis C for many years. In the past two years trials were completed for two recently approved drugs, Sofosbuvir (Sovaldi) and simeprevir (Olysio).

“We’ve been treating patients with the next round of drugs and have had a great deal of success,” said Dr. Santoro. “Some who have tested negative and have been cured of the virus for over a year.”

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The Hepatitis Center will be hosting the second annual Hepatitis conference on "New and Emerging Strategies to Simplify the Cure of Chronic HCV Infection" on May 1, 2014 at Rams Head Inn.

ABOUT:

Since opening its doors in 1979, AGA has become one of the largest and most sophisticated gastrointestinal treatment centers in the South Jersey area. With integrity and patient care as their primary goal, AGA board certified gastroenterologists, nurse practitioners, and staff treat over 5,000 patients each year.


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