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Gov. Cuomo names UB expert to statewide task force on hepatitis C virus

Talal uses telemedicine and other innovations to treat hepatitis C virus in people who inject drugs

By Ellen Goldbaum

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – Andrew H. Talal, MD, professor of medicine at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the University at Buffalo, has been appointed to Gov. Cuomo's task force that will advise the state on its Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Elimination Plan.

The task force brings together the state's leading HCV health care providers, researchers, government leaders, patient support providers, advocates, and education and social service providers.

Talal, an expert in liver disease and HCV, especially among vulnerable populations, is a researcher with the Clinical and Translational Science Institute at UB.

He is currently principal investigator with other UB faculty on a five-year Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) award dedicated to developing innovative ways to treat HCV in persons with substance use disorders. The award funds efforts developed by Talal and his colleagues to use telemedicine -- two-way live videoconferencing -- to reach patients at a dozen substance use treatment centers throughout New York State, including in New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and the Hudson Valley. It also involves a partnership with Catholic Health.

Talal also sees patients as a physician with UBMD Internal Medicine and directs a liver diseases specialty practice at Kaleida Health's Buffalo General Medical Center.

"Governor Cuomo was the first governor in the nation to introduce the concept of statewide elimination of hepatitis C virus infection," said Talal. "I am honored to serve on this task force and to work with my colleagues toward achieving this challenging, but reachable, goal. It is conceivable to eliminate hepatitis C virus among patients who inject drugs, by bringing treatment and education to them where they receive treatment, such as in substance use treatment facilities."

At UB, and assisted by a five-year, \$3 million grant from the Troup Fund of the Kaleida Health Foundation, Talal has built bridges with clinical partners at Kaleida Health and UBMD Physicians' Group, to bring advanced liver disease care to Western New York patients through the BGMCC Liver Practice. He also focuses on expanding linkages to care for medically disenfranchised populations, such as patients who inject drugs.

A recent study found that from 1999 to 2016, deaths in the U.S. from cirrhosis of the liver, which can result from HCV, have risen 65 percent while liver cancer deaths have doubled. HCV affects more than 100,000 New Yorkers, most of whom don't know they have the disease; it can be easily treated in many cases with new anti-viral drugs.

"The efficacy, tolerability and shortened treatment duration with these new therapies are crucial messages to disseminate," Talal said.



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Andrew H. Talal, MD,
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Gale Burstein, MD, Erie County Commissioner of Health and clinical professor of pediatrics at the Jacobs School, has also been named to the task force.

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