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VA launches largest ever liver cancer screening study

WASHINGTON — In 2023, the Department of Veterans Affairs will embark on a study to determine the most effective screening technique for liver cancer, a deadly cancer that can be cured if caught early. This is the largest clinical trial in history related to liver cancer screening.

The study will determine whether detecting liver cancer earlier with abbreviated MRI can make a difference for patients' risk of death. Better known as PREMIUM — **PRE**venting Liver Cancer **M**ortality through **I**maging with **U**ltrasound vs. **M**RI — the trial's objective is to determine whether screening with abbreviated magnetic resonance imaging is better than ultrasound, the current standard of care in reducing liver cancer deaths in Veterans.

"This type of large, multicenter trial could only be conducted in VA — the largest integrated health care system in the country," said **Assistant Under Secretary of Health for Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D.** "VA has a high prevalence of patients with advanced liver disease who could benefit from screening for liver cancer. The study has the potential to change clinical practice for tens of thousands of Veterans and non-Veterans alike, and it could answer key questions about liver cancer screening that have been debated for more than three decades."

This effort is a part of the Biden-Harris Administration's [Cancer Moonshot](#) to care for those with cancer and end cancer as we know it. Liver cancer is the sixth leading cause of cancer-related death in the U.S. The PREMIUM trial will recruit 4,700 Veterans with cirrhosis (liver scarring caused by several different conditions) from 47 VA medical centers.

VA's Veterans Health Administration is the largest health care provider in the U.S. for patients with cirrhosis, a leading risk factor for liver cancer. Enrollment will begin in 2023 and follow participants over an 8-year period. This is the first clinical trial to compare the two screening methods (ultrasound and MRI) for effect on patient death.

Ultrasound has long been the standard of care for liver cancer screening. However, its quality can vary significantly depending on the person doing the procedure and the body type of the patient. MRI is the gold standard for detecting liver cancer once a mass is detected on ultrasound. Abbreviated MRI, a much shorter procedure than standard MRI, has shown promise in detecting liver cancer at early stages.

The trial is led by co-chairs Dr. George Ioannou of the VA Puget Sound Healthcare System and Dr. Tamar Taddei of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, sponsored by the VA Cooperative Studies Program and coordinated by the West Haven CSP Coordinating Center.

For more information, visit the [PREMIUM clinical trial site](#).

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