

## **Tulane pathologist gets \$2.6 million in NIH awards for hepatitis C research**

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Tulane University Pathology Professor [Srikanta Dash](#) has been awarded two National Institutes of Health grants totaling \$2.6 million to study why some patients respond and others develop resistance to standard treatments for chronic hepatitis C, the most common cause of end-stage liver disease.

Dash, who is director of Tulane's Hepatitis Research Laboratory, received a \$1.4 million, four-year grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases to explore the mechanisms behind a gene, interleukin-28B (IL-28B), that plays a critical role in whether a patient with hepatitis C (HCV) responds to antiviral treatment.

More than 60 percent of HCV patients are able to clear the virus through a treatment combination of interferon, ribavirin and protease inhibitors. Dash's team hopes to explain why those with certain variants of the IL-28B gene are able to respond to treatments better than those who lack the gene. Many African Americans lack the gene, leading to poorer treatment outcomes for minority patients, Dash said.

"The patients who do not respond to interferon treatment experience long-term inflammation of the liver and are at increased risk of developing liver cirrhosis and liver cancer," Dash said.

The second award is a \$1.2 million National Cancer Institute grant to study how chronic HCV patients develop resistance to standard interferon therapies.

"The knowledge gained from these investigations will increase our understanding of hepatitis C virus resistance mechanisms to interferon and ribavirin and explore the therapeutic utility of a new type-III interferon as an alternative strategy to overcome resistance, clear the virus and prevent liver cancer," Dash said.