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## **Hamilton Medical Center offering new COVID-19 treatment to qualified patients to make hospital admission less likely**

**DALTON, Ga. (January 27, 2021)** – A new COVID-19 treatment, bamlanivimab, that recently began being offered by Hamilton Medical Center (HMC) may help certain patients from developing a more severe case of the disease.

The research so far shows that for certain people, taking this drug may help limit the amount of virus in the body. This may help their symptoms improve sooner — and they may be less likely to need to go to the hospital.

“We’re excited to be offering this treatment,” said Lee Connor, MD, infectious disease specialist. “It can be a life saver for certain patients and provides a greater chance for them to recover at home. It also could help Hamilton by helping curb the influx of COVID patients coming to the hospital with severe disease and requiring admission.”

The drug uses monoclonal antibodies, laboratory-made proteins that mimic the immune system’s ability to fight off harmful pathogens, such as viruses.

A new clinic for monoclonal antibody infusion has been set up in an unused space in the Burkett Building, next to the hospital. Patients enter through a dedicated entrance and do not enter the hospital to receive the treatment.

Bamlanivimab is a neutralizing antibody drug. When there’s a virus in your body, like COVID-19, your immune system makes antibodies to fight it off. But it takes time for your body to make antibodies when a new virus is present — and in the meantime, you could become very sick.

Bamlanivimab contains man-made antibodies that are similar to the antibodies of patients who recovered from COVID-19. Scientists believe that these antibodies may help limit the amount of virus in your body. This could give your body more time to learn how to make its own antibodies. Bamlanivimab does not have any COVID-19 virus in it.

The treatments are given to high-risk COVID-19 patients, which includes people who are at least 65 years old and those who have medical conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease or cancer. The treatment must be given within 7 days of first symptom, and the earlier the better.

A doctor referral is needed, and all appointments for the clinic are scheduled, no walk ins.

Bamlanivimab is an investigational medicine, authorized for emergency use by the FDA. There is a vast supply of the drug. It is not authorized for the treatment of patients who are already hospitalized due to COVID-19 or require oxygen therapy as a result of the disease, according to the FDA.

At this time, the federal government is distributing antibody supplies at no cost to patients. However, insurance is billed to cover the cost of administering the drug.

If you think you might qualify, talk with your doctor to decide if this treatment is right for you.

“Though these treatments are available, vaccines remain the best hope to ‘burn out’ the pandemic,” said Connor. “But that will require 70-80 percent of the population to be vaccinated, and those who have already had COVID-19 should still get vaccinated. When it’s available for you, I encourage you to take it. It’s very safe and very effective.

Connor also said that masks, social distancing, frequent handwashing and avoiding large group gatherings are still extremely important to keep the virus under control.

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**Photo: Lee Connor, MD**