

Hepatitis C Virus Infection: A Single Center Experience

Maheeba A M Abdulla, CABM, MRCP (UK)* Jehad R A Al Qamish, FRACP,
MRCP (UK)**

Background: HCV infection is increasing and the number of patients evaluated is a fraction of the total population. There is no previous study in Bahrain documenting the characteristics of these patients, their risk factors, presentation, source of referral, viral load and genotyping, response to therapy and their follow up.

Objective: The aim of this study is to evaluate the characteristics of patients with hepatitis C virus infection and their response to therapy.

Setting: Gastroenterology Unit, Department of Internal Medicine at SMC.

Design: Retrospective study.

Method: One hundred and eighty-three patients with hepatitis C virus infection identified based on positive HCV RNA test, were reviewed between January 2002 and March 2006. Only adult patients with records have been included. Children were excluded.

Result: One hundred and twenty-five males (68.3%) and 58 (31.7%) females with HCV infection were reviewed. The mean age was 42 years. The most common risk factor was history of blood transfusion in 64 patients (35%). Primary health care was the main source of referral in 39 (21.3%). The average period between exposure to presentation was 12.7 years. Many patients 77 (42.1%) had signs or symptoms of liver disease at presentation. The HCV RNA viral load was low (<600,000 IU/ml) in 79 (43.2%) patients. Most patients had genotype one 67 (36.6%). Only 54 patients had their treatment documented and their records were available for analysis. Twenty-three patients 23/54 (42.6%) had achieved sustained viral response (SVR). One hundred and twenty-nine patients (70.5%) had inadequate records on treatment and follow-up.

Conclusion: This study showed that blood transfusion is the main risk factor for HCV infection in Bahrain. HCV genotype one is the most common and many patients presented with low viral load. Many patients with HCV were not on treatment and many were not referred for further evaluation.

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