

Chronic Hepatitis C Virus Infection Can Be Cured!

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Chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is common, affecting 1.3% of the US population and is the leading cause of liver cirrhosis, liver cancer and death from liver disease in the United States. There is misconception among HCV patients and primary care physicians/nurse practitioners that HCV is not curable. More than too often, patients were so surprised when I told them that HCV could be cured. I have patients whose treatment were delayed too long until they received liver transplant.

The patients are usually infected with the virus by intravenous illegal drug use through sharing needles, blood transfusion before 1992, blood contamination by accidents and tattoo by non-professionals. Viral transmission by sexual intercourse was identified by recent research. Most HCV patients have no symptoms or minor symptom until they develop severe liver cirrhosis or liver cancer. The most common and prominent symptom is chronic fatigue. Some HCV patients were treated for chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia for years until they are found to have HCV infection.

There are several different genotypes of HCV. The most common genotype in the US is Genotype 1, followed by Genotype 2, 3, 4 and 6. The standard treatment for HCV infection is a combination therapy with interferon and ribavirin. About 50-60% of genotype 1 HCV infection can be cured with 1 year of standard therapy (sustained virologic response), while more than 80% of Genotype 2 or 3 can be cured with 6 months of standard treatment according to the literature. My personal experience with HCV treatment showed a much higher curable rate with more than 75% with HCV genotype 1 and more than 90% with HCV genotype 2 or 3. It might be related to my strict selection of the patients for the treatment.

The response to the standard treatment can be determined in the first 3 months of treatment. Only the responders will continue the treatment. The non-responder or refractory cases can be treated in clinic trial with new promising drugs like direct antiviral agents.

Recent study demonstrated that all HCV patients should be treated to prevent complications and the treatment should be started as early as when it is detected. If you have any question about HCV infection or any other liver diseases, please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!