

Fibromyalgia and Hepatitis C

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A 50-year-old gentleman came to my clinic for loss of appetite and weight loss. He has lost 30 pounds over the last one year. He has no appetite for food and he has to force himself to eat. He has had mild abdominal discomfort in the upper abdomen several years after gallbladder removal. He was disabled for bipolar disease. He was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, chronic pain syndrome and chronic fatigue syndrome by his primary care physician. He was referred to pain clinic and has been on large doses of narcotics and sedatives for his pain and nerves. He denied constipation and said that he actually has loose stools several times per day since his gallbladder removal. Extensive work-up was performed. Pancreatic deficiency was ruled out.

Upper GI endoscopy showed that he has severe bile reflux gastritis and signs of portal hypertension. During follow-up visit, I further questioned his drug use history. He admitted he used IV drugs when he was in his 20's. He had heavily abused alcohol for 10 years but he quit almost 15 year ago. Blood work showed he has hepatitis C (HCV) with high circulating HCV virus.

He received treatment for his gastritis and he is gaining weight with improved appetite. I then started to treat him for hepatitis C with newly developed anti-hepatitis protocol. It was a difficult 6-month regimen for him but he successfully finished the treatment. The HCV virus was eradicated from his body. In his 3-month follow-up, he told me that he has not been feeling so well for the last 30 years and he can almost stop all his pain and nerve medications.

Hepatitis C kills more Americans than HIV nowadays. Center for Disease Control recently recommends screening all baby boomers for HCV due to high prevalence and because highly effective treatment is available. **Hepatitis C is extremely common among people with diagnosis of fibromyalgia, chronic pain syndrome and chronic fatigue syndrome.** Patients on chronic narcotics and sedative for above problems should be screened for HCV because HCV infection can lead to similar symptoms like depression and fibromyalgia. If you have chronic fatigue and chronic pain with vague diagnosis of fibromyalgia (without proper work-up or not diagnosed by rheumatologist), please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!