

**EVALUATION OF THE RISK OF
ATHEROSCLEROSIS IN CHRONIC HEPATITIS C
PATIENTS**

Thesis Submitted for fulfillment of the MD Degree in Tropical Medicine

By

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2009*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost I feel indebted to GOD the most kind and most merciful.

I would like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to **Prof. Dr. Nabeel El-Kady**, Professor of Tropical Medicine, Cairo University, for his sincere guidance and his comprehensive technical help and support throughout the work, without his valuable comments, inexhaustible tireless efforts, patience and collaboration afforded, this work would not have been completed.

I wish to express my deep appreciation and profound gratitude to **Prof. Dr. Soliman Ghareeb**, Professor of Cardiology, Cairo University, for his valuable supervision, advice and continuous encouragement allthrough this work.

My deep thanks and appreciation to **Prof. Dr. Mostafa Kamal**, Professor of community medicine, Ain Shams University, for his strict supervision and revision of this work, he gave me much of his time, experience and support.

And of course no words can express my deep gratitude and appreciation to **Prof. Dr Gamal Esmat**, professor of tropical medicine, Cairo University for his time, help, support, experience, encouragement allthrough this work and for giving me the chance to participate in the project of (HCV and Atherosclerosis).

I would like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to **Dr Mohammad Said Abdel-Aziz**, lecturer of tropical medicine, Cairo University for his time, patience, strict supervision and revision of this work, and collaboration afforded.

My deep thanks to **Prof. Dr. Maisa El-Razky** Professor of tropical medicine and **Prof. Dr Hatem El-Azizi** Assistant Professor of radiology for their effort and time to perform abdominal and carotid ultrasound for the patients of this study.

I would like to thank **Dr. Wafaa El-Akel** and **Dr. Aya Kamal** for their effort and time to help me to complete the statistics of this work.

Finally, I would like to thank all staff members of the National Hepatology and Tropical Medicine Research Institute (NHTMRI), all members of (HCV and atherosclerosis) project, all staff members of the the Tropical Medicine Department and the Bilharzial Liver unit, Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University, all my colleagues, all patients and volunteers included in this work and every one made any effort for this work to be a reality.

Mohammad El-Sayed

ABSTRACT

HCV infection is associated with increased common carotid intima-media thickness (IMT) and carotid-artery plaques in some but not all studies. The aim of this study is to evaluate the relationship between chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, clearance of HCV and atherosclerosis. It was found that chronic HCV is associated with favourable lipid profile (significant lower serum levels of total cholesterol, TGs and LDL-c). It was also associated with significant higher mesenteric fat thickness and non significant increase in the carotid IMT.

(Key Words): Chronic hepatitis C – Atherosclerosis – Intima media thickness.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALT	Alanine transaminase
AST	Aspartate transaminase
ALP	Alkaline Phosphatase
Apo A1	Apolipoprotein A1
Apo B	Apolipoprotein B
CHD	Coronary Heart Disease
CMV	Cytomegalo Virus
CP	Chlamydia Pneumonia
CRP	C reactive protein
DICOM	Digital Imaging and Communication in Medicine
ELISA	Enzyme Linked Immunosorbant Assay
ETR	End of Treatment Response
HAI	Hepatic Activity Index
HBV	Hepatitis B Virus
HCV	Hepatitis C Virus
HCC	Hepatocellular Carcinoma
HDL	High Density Lipoprotein
HP	Helicobacter Pylori
HSP	Heat Shock Protein
IFN	Interferon
IMT	Intima Media Thickness
IMT f	Intima Media Thickness of the far wall
IMT n	Intima Media Thickness of the near wall
IR	Insulin Resistance
LD	Lumen Diameter
LDL	Low Density Lipoprotein
LPS	Lipopolysaccharide
MTP	Microsomal Triglyceride Transfer Protein
NAFLD	Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease
NASH	Non Alcoholic Steatohepatitis
NCD	Non Communicable Disease
NCEP	National Cholesterol Education program

List of Abbreviations

ORF	Opening Reading Frame
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
SVR	Sustained Virological Response
TC	Total Cholesterol
TGs	Triglycerides
TIFF	Tagged Image File Format
TMR	Transcription Mediated Amplification
TNF	Tumour Necrosis Factor
VEGF	Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor
VLDL	Very Low Density Lipoprotein
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The incidence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease (CVD), diabetes, cancer, renal, genetic and respiratory diseases is rising significantly in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Currently, 47% of the Region's burden of disease is due to NCDs and it is expected that this will rise to 60% by the year 2020. The modifiable risk factors—smoking, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, expressed as diabetes, obesity and high lipids—are the root causes of the global epidemic in NCD. In Egypt noncommunicable diseases account for about 42% of the total deaths while CVD accounts for about 22% (*WHO, 2004*).

In 1999, CVD and diabetes ranked highest in the league of years of life lost due to premature mortality. In men, these accounted for 23.7% of total years of life lost (YLLs), compared with the second most common cause of premature death, injuries, accounting for 11.7%. CVD and diabetes also accounted for the greatest number of YLL in women (*National Information Center for Health & Population, 1999*).

Hepatitis C is a major cause of liver-related morbidity and mortality and represents a major public health problem in Egypt and worldwide (*Alberti and Benvegnu, 2003*).

Egypt has the highest hepatitis C virus (HCV) prevalence in the world (overall prevalence of HCV antibody is 12% in the general population, reaching 40% in persons over age 40 in rural areas) (*Medhat et al, 2002*).

HCV is the predominant cause of chronic liver disease (CLD) in Egypt and there is a large underlying reservoir of HCV-caused liver disease (*Strickland et al., 2002*).

In Egypt, HCV is the main cause of hepatocellular carcinoma which occurs in older patients, nearly all of them have advanced fibrosis and cirrhosis (*EL-Sahhar, 2004*).

The countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region are, therefore, suffering from a double burden of both communicable and noncommunicable diseases (*WHO, 2004*).

The link between communicable and noncommunicable diseases could exist. In some studies, chronic infections have been found to be associated with atherosclerosis (*Leinonen and Saikku, 2002*).

Inflammation plays a central role in the initiation and progression of atherosclerotic disease (*Hansson, 2005*). It was suggested that infection burden was associated with prevalence of coronary atherosclerosis, and it was particularly important when C-reactive protein was elevated. The high level infection burden could predict vulnerable plaque (*Niu et al, 2005*).

The possible association between HBs Ag positivity and carotid atherosclerosis was investigated. Findings suggest a possible role of chronic hepatitis B infection in the pathogenesis of carotid arteriosclerosis (*Ishizaka et al, 2002*). Other pathogens were found to be associated with atherosclerosis include chlamydia pneumoniae, cytomegalovirus, herpes simplex virus, helicobacter pylori and respiratory infections (*Smeeth et al, 2004*).

But whether prior infection causes atherosclerosis is unclear. Pathogens could plausibly promote the development of atherosclerosis in a number of ways, including pro-inflammatory and pro-thrombotic effects, disturbances of lipid metabolism, endothelial dysfunction, and increased vulnerability to Plaque rupture (*Shah, 2001*).

It is possible, but unproven, that hepatitis C (HCV) infection accelerates atherosclerosis. It was concluded that donor hepatitis-C virus seropositivity is an independent risk factor for increased mortality and for the development of accelerated allograft vasculopathy after cardiac transplantation. These observations may have implications for the use of HCV-positive donors in heart transplant recipients (*Haji et al, 2004*).

By analyzing the data of subjects who had undergone general health-screening tests, a possible association between carotid atherosclerosis and seropositivity of antibody against hepatitis C virus (HCV) has been reported (*Ishizaka et al, 2003*).

A pilot study was done to assess the atherosclerosis risk factors among those with chronic HCV infection. The lower blood pressure, as well as the better lipid profile, suggests a lower risk of CVD in the group chronically infected with HCV compared to others. But fasting glucose levels were higher among those with chronic HCV infection compared to those not infected (*Schwarzinger et al, 2004*) and (*Arafa et al, 2005*).

Chronic hepatitis C is a recognized risk factor for type 2 diabetes and it could be implicated into the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis. The role of hepatitis C virus (HCV)-related steatosis in these epidemiological associations remains to be determined (*Adinolfi et al, 2005*).

Data regarding the association between atherosclerosis and HCV are controversial. HCV infection is associated with increased common carotid intima-media thickness (IMT) (which is a marker of early atherosclerosis, its anatomic extent and progression) and carotid-artery plaques in some (*Vassalle et al, 2004*), but not all studies (*Volzke et al, 2004*).