

**ROLE OF RIBAVIRIN MONOTHERAPY IN
NORMALISING TRANSAMINASES IN HCV
INFECTED PATIENTS UNDER
CHEMOTHERAPY**

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Background: The prevalence of HCV infections in children with cancer is 54.3% with the highest rate among patients with leukemia. HCV could worsen the outcome of successfully treated pediatric oncology patients. Due to concerns that antineoplastic therapy produces prolonged decrease in immune function, options other than combination of peginterferon alfa and ribavirin should be studied in pediatric cancer patients while on chemotherapy. The role of ribavirin monotherapy and its effect on transaminases is discussed in these patients. **Subjects and Methods:** The present study was a retrospective case cohort of 65 pediatric hematological cancer patients on chemotherapy; 23 patients with HCV and on ribavirin monotherapy, 19 patients with HCV receiving no therapy and 23 patients not infected with HCV. ALT level was measured every 3 months for 2 years of follow up and at every phase of chemotherapy, viral load, total bilirubin level, number of hepatitis flares and hemoglobin level were compared between the three groups and pre – and during ribavirin therapy in group I and also effect of HDMTX on ALT level was studied. **Results:** There was a significant decrease of ALT level and number of hepatitis flares during ribavirin therapy compared to before therapy. Viral load decreased after therapy compared to before therapy but the difference did not reach a significant level. No significant decline in hemoglobin level post ribavirin therapy was found and total bilirubin levels significantly increased after therapy. ALT level was significantly high in HCV infected patients treated with HDMTX compared to those who were not receiving HDMTX in the second year of follow up. **Conclusions:** Ribavirin as a monotherapy has a significant role in normalizing ALT level in HCV infected pediatric cancer patients on chemotherapy. But its effect on the decrease in HCV viral load is not reliable.

LIST OF CONTENTS

Title	Page No.
Introduction	1
Aim of the Work	3
Review of Literature	
• Hepatitis in pediatric cancer patients	4
• Hepatotropic Viral Infection in Childhood Cancer	21
• Hepatitis C in Pediatric Cancer Patients	37
Subjects and Methods	81
Results	89
Discussion	115
Summary	132
Conclusions	135
Recommendations	136
References	137
Appendix	
Arabic Summary	—

LIST OF TABLES

Tab. No.	Title	Page No.
Table (1):	Causes of Liver Test Abnormalities in Cancer Patients:.....	11
Table (2):	For hepatitis B definitions:	26
Table (3):	Estimated prevelance of hepatitis C by region:	38
Table (4):	Risk factors for hepatitis C virus infection:	41
Table (5):	Phases of the immune response against different pathogens are summarized in the following table:	48
Table (6):	Factors affecting the outcome of acute hepatitis C virus infection:	55
Table (7):	Baseline investigations associated with hepatitis C antiviral therapy in adults:.....	61
Table (8):	Contraindication for hepatitis C therapy with interferon and ribavirin	65
Table (9):	Side effects of antiviral therapy:.....	66
Table (10):	Recommended Ribavirin* Dosing in Combination Therapy (Pediatrics):.....	76
Table (11):	Patients for whom ribavirin use should be avoided or modified:.....	79
Table (12):	Demographic data of the studied patients with hematological malignancies.....	90
Table (13):	Demographic data of the studied patients with non hematological malignancies.....	93
Table (14):	Comparison of ALT level in HCV infected hematological cancer patients since diagnosis of HCV (Mann-Whitney test).	94
Table (15):	Comparison of total bilirubin level in HCV infected hematological cancer patients since diagnosis of HCV (Mann-Whitney test)......	96
Table (16):	Comparison between the three studied groups according to mean and maximum ALT during different phases of chemotherapy (Kruskal Wallis test).	97

LIST OF TABLES (Cont...)

Tab. No.	Title	Page No.
Table (17):	Comparison between pairs of groups were performed using Mann-Whitney test with Bonferroni correction, critical level of significance will be <0.016).	98
Table (18):	Comparison between ALT level at different phases of chemotherapy in each group of the three studied groups (Friedman Test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test).	100
Table (19):	Effect of high dose MTX on ALT level at 1 st and 2 nd year of follow up in HCV infected patients (group I and group II) (Mann-Whitney test).	103
Table (20):	Comparison of hepatitis flares between the three studied groups (Kruskal Wallis test).	105
Table (21):	Comparison between pairs of groups were performed (Mann-Whitney test with Bonferroni correction), critical level of significance will be <0.016)	106
Table (22):	Comparison between ALT, bilirubin , PCR, HB, and numbers of hepatitis flares before and during ribavirin therapy (*Unpaired t test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test).	107
Table (23):	Correlation between ALT level and the dose and duration of ribavirin monotherapy. (Spearman' correlation coefficient: r).	110
Table (24):	Descriptive data of liver biopsy in relation to ALT level and total bilirubin in HCV infected patients: Group I (4 cases) and Group II (5 cases).	110
Table (25):	Descriptive data of the studied patients with solid tumors:	111

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. No.	Title	Page No.
Figure (1):	Virologic, immunologic and biochemical events during the course of experimental hepatitis A virus infection in chimpanzees inoculated intravenously with human HAV, strain HLD2. ALT, alanine aminotransferase.....	22
Figure (2):	Model for the transmission of hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis D virus (HDV).....	32
Figure (3):	Natural history of HCV infection (upper panel) and immunologic responses to HCV infection (lower panel).....	45
Figure (4):	Natural history of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.....	46
Figure (5):	Algorithm for testing for hepatitis C infection.....	60
Figure (6):	Proposed algorithm for the diagnosis and treatment of an acute HCV infection.....	62
Figure (7):	Evolution of HCV therapy and response rates	63
Figure (8):	Algorithm for hepatitis C antiviral therapy..	64
Figure (9):	Chemical structures of adenosine, ribavirin, and viremudin.....	69
Figure (10):	Sex distribution of the studied groups with hematological malignancies.....	91
Figure (11):	Distribution of different diagnosis of the studied groups with hematological malignancies.....	92
Figure (12):	ALT level in HCV infected hematological cancer patients since diagnosis of HCV.....	95
Figure (13):	Total bilirubin level in HCV infected hematological cancer patients since diagnosis of HCV.....	96
Figure (14):	Comparison between the three studied groups according to mean and max ALT at different phases of chemotherapy.....	99

LIST OF FIGURES (Cont...)

Fig. No.	Title	Page No.
Figure (15):	Comparison between mean ALT at different phases of chemotherapy in each group of the three studied groups	100
Figure (16):	Comparison between maximum ALT at different phases of chemotherapy in each group of the three studied groups.....	102
Figure (17):	Comparison between ALT at 1 st and 2 nd year of follow up in HCV infected patients who received high dose methotrexate as part of their chemotherapy regimen compared to those who did not.	104
Figure (18):	Comparison between ALT level before and during ribavirin therapy in group I.....	108
Figure (19):	Comparison between T bilirubin level before and during ribavirin therapy in group I.	109

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbrev.	Meaning
6MP	: 6 mercaptopurine
ALF	: Acute liver failure
ALL	: Acute lymphoblastic leukemia
ALP	: Alkaline phosphatase
ALT	: Alanine aminotransaminase
AML	: Acute myeloid leukemia
Anti-HBc	: Antibody to hepatitis B core antigen
Anti-HBs	: Antibody to hepatitis B surface antigen
AST	: Aspartate aminotransaminase
CAHC	: Chronic active hepatitis C
CMV	: Cytomegalovirus.
CYP	: Cytochromes P-450
EBV	: Epstein –Barr virus
FHF	: Fulminant hepatic failure
GGT	: Gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase
GOT	: Glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase = AST
GPT	: Glutamic-pyruvic transaminase = ALT
GST	: Glutathione S-transferase
HAV	: Hepatitis A virus
HbeAg	: Hepatitis B e antigen
HbsAg	: Hepatitis B surface antigen
HBV	: Hepatitis B virus
HCC	: Hepatocellular carcinoma
HCV	: Hepatitis C virus
HDV	: Hepatitis D virus
HEV	: Hepatitis E virus
HGV	: Hepatitis G virus
HHV-6A & HHV-6B	: Human herpesvirus 6 variants A and B
HHV-7	: Human herpesvirus 7
HR	: High risk group
HSCT	: Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation
HSV	: Herpes simplex virus
HVOD	: Hepatic veno – occlusive disease
IFN – γ	: Interferon gamma
IL- 1, IL -6, IL -12	: Interleukin 1 , 2, 12

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (Cont...)

Abbrev.	Meaning
IMPDH	: Inosine monophosphate dehydrogenase
ISC:	: Interferon secreting cell
LDH:	: Lactic dehydrogenase
LE:	: Leukoencephalopathy
LR:	: Low risk group
LT	: Liver transplantation
MALT	: Mucosal- associated lymphoid tissues
MBL	: Mannan-building lectin
MOF	: Multiorgan failure
MTHFR C677T	: Methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase C677T
MTX	: Methotrexate
NHL	: Non hodgkin lymphoma
NK cells	: Natural killer cells
OLT	: Orthotopic liver transplant
PCR	: Polymerase chain reaction
PD-1	: Programmed death 1
PEG-IFN	: Pegylated interferon
PGE-1	: Prostaglandin E 1
PMN	: Polymorphic nuclear cells
PTLD	: Posttransplant lymphoproliferative disease
RBV	: Ribavirin
RFC1 G80A	: Reduced folate carrier 1 G80A
RMP	: Ribavirin 5'-monophosphate
RSV	: Respiratory syncytial virus
RTP	: Ribavirin 5'-triphosphate
SARS	: Severe acute respiratory syndrome
SCT	: Stem cell transplantation
SOS	: Sinusoidal obstructive syndrome
SOT	: Solid organ transplant
SVR	: Sustained virologic response
TGF- β	: Transforming growth factor β
TNF – α	: Tumor necrosis factor alpha
TPMT	: Thiopurine methyl transferase
UGT1A1	: Uridine diphosphate glucuronosyltransferase
VEGF	: Vascular endothelial growth factor
VZV	: Varicella – zoster virus

INTRODUCTION

Patients treated for pediatric malignancy are at high risk of parentally transmitted viral hepatitis (*Kebudi et al., 2000*). Blood product transfusions are the major risk factors. Moreover, when compared with immunocompetent patients, the immunodepression caused by chemotherapy increases the chronicity rate of viral hepatitis (*Simone et al., 2000*).

The successful cloning of hepatitis C virus (HCV) genome and development of serologic markers of HCV infection showed that HCV was responsible for 85% -90% of parentally transmitted non-A non-B hepatitis (*Xiong et al., 1998*).

The prognosis of chronic HCV is a matter of controversy. HCV could worsen the outcome of successfully treated pediatric oncology patients because a progression rate to cirrhosis of 20% has been documented in follow up studies of up to 29 years in HCV infected adults with no other disease (*Davis, 1999*).

An Egyptian study found that the seropositivities for HBV and HCV were 3.6% and 0.9% respectively among the patients were proved to have pediatric malignancies. The seropositivities for HBV and HCV infection after six months of chemotherapy increased significantly to 18.2%

and 13.1%, respectively (*Mostafa et al., 2003*). Furthermore, a three year prospective survey has shown an incidence rate of 79% for HBV and 62% for HCV in children with hematological malignancies and severe outcome of liver disease in HBV and HBV/HCV infected children (*El-Sayed et al., 2003*).

Ribavirin, a nucleoside analogue, was one of the first drugs shown to reduce the ability of viruses to reproduce. Ribavirin is effective against many different types of viruses, particularly RNA viruses such as HCV (*Dorny, 1999*). A systematic review of ribavirin monotherapy identified 13 randomized trials including 594 patients with chronic hepatitis C. The review found that ribavirin versus placebo/no intervention had no significant beneficial effect on virological response and liver morbidity, but may improve biochemical and histological response. Ribavirin, however, increased the risk of anemia (*Brok et al., 2005*).

AIM OF THE WORK

- 1- To evaluate the role of ribavirin monotherapy in normalising transaminases in hepatitis C virus (HCV) infected pediatric patients undergoing chemotherapy for hematological malignancies and whether it has an effect on viral load of infected patient.
- 2- To evaluate ribavirin safety and impact on duration of stoppage of chemotherapy compared to an HCV-infected control group under chemotherapy.
- 3- To show hepatotoxic effect of chemotherapy on pediatric patients with hematological malignancies represented by ALT level at different phases of chemotherapy, moreover the effect of HDMTX on ALT level in HCV infected cancer patients during 2 years of follow up.

Chapter 1

HEPATITIS IN PEDIATRIC CANCER PATIENTS

Viral Hepatitis:

Advances in supportive care over the past two decades have decreased the morbidity and mortality attributed to opportunistic infections in immunocompromised patients, including those with hematologic malignancies, hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT), and aplastic anemia. Despite advances in antiviral therapy, opportunistic viral infections still cause significant morbidity and mortality in patients with compromised host defenses (*Jancel and Penzak, 2009*). In immunocompetent patients, primary infection by herpes simplex virus (HSV), varicella-zoster virus (VZV), cytomegalovirus (CMV), human herpesvirus 6, and Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) generally produces mild, self-limited hepatitis (*Cisneros-Herreros and Herrero-Romero, 2006*).

Herpes Simplex Virus

Infections caused by HSV are the most common viral infections in patients with lymphoma and acute leukemia. These infections occur predominantly in patients with preexistent antibodies to HSV, indicating that most represent reactivation of endogenous latent infection. More

than 80% of bone marrow transplant recipients will have reactivation of latent HSV residing in the neuronal ganglia .Dissemination of HSV infection is uncommon and occurs most often in patients with Hodgkin disease. The liver, spleen, adrenal glands, kidneys, pancreas, lungs, brain, and gastrointestinal tract may be involved in disseminated infection (*Perry and Faulds, 1996*). Herpes virus hepatitis (HSV) represents a form of acute necrotizing hepatitis, which most frequently develops in immunocompromised patients (*Longerich et al., 2005*). Hepatitis is a rare complication of herpes simplex virus (HSV), often leading to acute liver failure (ALF), liver transplantation (LT), and/or death. Patients who are male, older, immunocompromised, and/or presenting with significant liver dysfunction are more likely to progress to death (*Norvell et al., 2008*). The diagnosis is frequently obscured by the absence of mucocutaneous involvement. Elevated transaminases with leucopenia and a relatively low bilirubin level may provide clues to the diagnosis (*Chatni et al., 2008*) .Therapeutic options include high-dose intravenous acyclovir and liver transplantation (*Longerich et al., 2005*).

Varicella Zoster virus

VZV is a double-stranded, linear DNA virus. Primary infection with VZV causes chicken pox in susceptible hosts (*Heininger and Seward, 2006*). Varicella hepatitis in immunocompetent hosts is usually self-limiting and asymptomatic, with subclinical elevation in serum transaminase levels (*Pitel et al., 1980*). However, severe