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TITLE: Hepatitis C Virus Infection: Mechanism of Disease
Progression

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Maria H. Sjogren, COL, MC
Brooke M. Huntley

CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: T.R.U.E. Research Foundation
San Antonio, Texas 78217-1239

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7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) T.R.U.E. Research Foundation San Antonio, Texas 78217-1239 E-Mail: maria.sjogren@na.amedd.army.mil			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words) An estimated 4 million individuals in the USA are chronically infected with the hepatitis C virus. Annually 8,000 to 10,000 of these subjects will die of liver-related complications and approximately 1,000 will require liver transplantation. The United States military have rates of HCV infection similar to the general US population (1.6%). However, it is a younger population and its natural history of HCV infection has not been studied. Therefore, the clinical outcome of HCV-infected military subjects and risk factors contributing to disease progression are largely unknown. Such knowledge is essential for decisions regarding optimal management and prevention of the disease. This study focuses on 200 active duty military subjects infected with HCV, who will be enrolled and observed prospectively over four years. Liver biopsies are to be performed at initiation if needed and at completion of study to observe for disease progression. Lab evaluation of virologic and biochemical indicators of the disease and detailed information about risk factors, and quality of life are collected by questionnaire every six months. Currently, it is too early to analyze the data in terms of disease progression and potential contributing factors to disease progression specific to this population, as no subjects have completed the study. Therefore, the data presented in this report will be confined to descriptive statistics of the sample to date.				
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INTRODUCTION

An estimated 4 million individuals in the USA are chronically infected with the Hepatitis C virus. Annually, 8,000 to 10,000 of these people will die of liver related complications and approximately 1,000 will require liver transplantation. Thus, HCV is a major public health problem. The US military population has rates of HCV infection similar to the general US population with an overall rate of 1.6%. However, it is a younger population and the natural history of HCV infection in the population has not been studied. Therefore, the clinical outcome of HCV infected military subjects is largely unknown. Specific factors in military life have not been studied to observe if they contribute to disease progression. Such knowledge is essential for decisions regarding optimal prevention and management of the disease.

A total of 200 active duty service members with chronic HCV infection will be enrolled and observed prospectively over four years in this study. Our principal hypothesis is that in active duty members infected with HCV genotype-1, liver disease progresses more rapidly than in subjects infected with HCV non-genotype-1. The effect of other factors that might influence histologic progression of liver disease including age, race, rank, deployment, alcohol consumption, and HCV RNA level will be assessed. To test this hypothesis we have the following specific aims:

- To compare the rate of progression of liver disease based on a histologic severity scale in military subjects infected with genotype-1 to the rate of progression in those infected with non-genotype-1.
- To identify other predictors of progression of histologic liver disease in a military population.
- To determine risk factors for acquisition of genotype-1 compared to non-genotype-1 HCV.
- To describe the natural history of HCV infection in a large group of a military population.

BODY

To date 75 subjects have been enrolled. There are 65 active participants, 2 are deceased, and 8 terminated participation early. Of those who terminated early, reasons cited included too far to travel and one felt the questions were not relevant, the others were lost to follow up. Enrollment is open and ongoing. We hope to accrue 200 patients total. This goal required downward adjusting in part due to the loss of Balboa Medical Center as an expected participating site. Deployment of active duty to Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. has also decreased the number of active duty members seeking care in our clinic. A no cost extension will be requested to improve our enrollment figures.

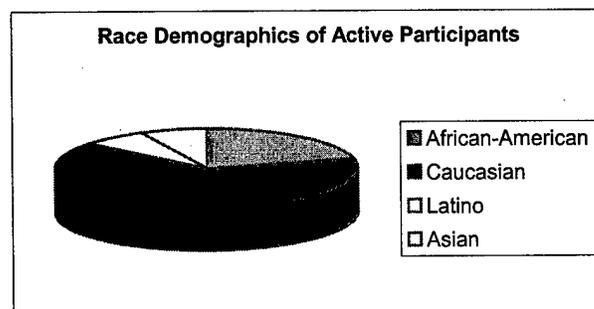
This is not an interventional study, no adverse events have been reported since the last APR.

At this point, no subjects have completed the study, and none are expected to complete it for another 1.5 years. Therefore, inferences cannot be made about histological progression until there is complete study data including the second liver biopsy. However, the existing active sample can be described as follows:

Sample Demographics:

- 80% of the sample is male.
- The ages range from 19 to 57. The mean age is 42.
- 21% of the sample is African American. 65% are Caucasian, 7% are Latino, and 7% are Asian (see figure 1).

Figure 1.



- 26% of our sample completed high school, 55% had at least some college, and 19% of the sample had post-graduate education.
- 53% of the sample had a household income of >\$50,000, 29% had a household income of \$25,000- \$50,000, 15% had a household income between \$10,000 and \$25,000, 1% had a household income of <\$10,000, and 1% declined to answer.
- 76% of the sample is enlisted.
- 42% of the sample think they have had HCV for at least 10 years, 22% think they have had it less than 10 years.

Baseline Lab/Histology Data:

By and large the sample does not have indicators of advanced (decompensated) liver disease as evidenced by biochemical indicators. At baseline, the mean PT is 13.4, mean albumin is 4.10, and mean ALT is 102.

- 39% of the sample had ALT less than 72, which is the high limit for males at WRAMC laboratories.
- 75% of the sample is genotype-1, 24% is genotype-non-1, and 1% of the sample is unknown.
- 55% of the sample had viral loads <500,000 IU/mL. Of this, 23% had viral loads >850,000 IU/mL.
- 25% of the sample had no or minimal fibrosis. 32% of the sample showed signs of periportal fibrosis and 28% of the sample had bridging fibrosis. 7% of the sample had cirrhosis.

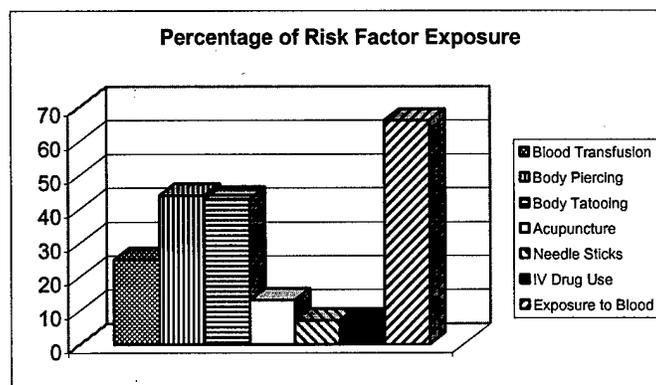
Lifestyle Factors potentially contributing to disease acquisition or progression:

- 12% of the sample self reports having a drinking problem now or in the past.
- 20% of the sample currently drinks alcohol at least once per week, 53% are abstainers.
- 13% has had a DUI.
- 27% of the sample have answered one of the CAGE questions affirmatively.
- 64% of the sample has a tobacco use history, but only 26% are current smokers.
- 18% had been incarcerated.
- 35% of the sample has had more than 10 sexual partners.
- 15% has had sexual intercourse with a prostitute.

Risk Factor Analysis (see figure 2):

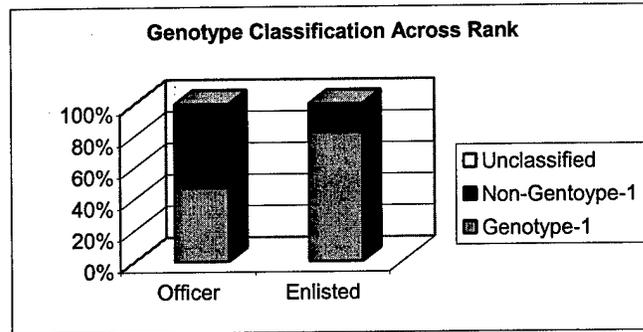
- 25% of the sample has a prior history of blood transfusion.
- 44% has at least one body piercing.
- 43% of the sample is tattooed.
- 13% has had acupuncture.
- 7% has had needle sticks.
- 7% of the sample has a past history of IV Drug Use.
- 66% report having had cutaneous exposure to somebody else's blood.
- 66% shared nail trimming instruments.

Figure 2.



We were able to examine this preliminary data to see if any trends or patterns emerged, specifically with respect to our aim of determining if there were any specific risk factors for acquisition of genotype-1 compared to non-genotype-1 HCV. An analysis looking at the relationship between genotype, demographics, and risk factors revealed that 47% of officers were genotype-1 while 82% of the enlisted subjects were genotype-1 (see figure 3). This difference was significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 3.



Quality of Life:

- 20% of the sample feels that they have been limited by their HCV in the past two weeks in performing their daily work at least some of the time during the past two weeks.
- 20% of the sample feels that their HCV has limited their activities (walking, climbing, stairs, carrying groceries, playing sports) at least some of the time in the past two weeks.
- 33% of the sample has had difficulty sleeping at night at least some of the time during the last two weeks.
- 44% of the sample worried at least some of the time during the past two weeks that their symptoms will develop into major problems.
- 41% of the sample worried at least some of the time during the past two weeks that they might die earlier than expected because of their Hepatitis C.
- 28% of the sample experienced emotional stress or strain in their relationships at least some of the time during the past two weeks as a result of their hepatitis C.

These data are generated from the chronic liver disease questionnaire-HCV (CLDQ-HCV), which is asked at baseline and each patient visit. The SF-36 of Hepatitis Quality of Life Questionnaire (HQLQ) is also administered at each visit. Upon completion of the study, HQLQ data will be scored by a professional scoring service, therefore, no analysis is available at the time of this report.

Therapy Outcomes

Although the subjects enrolled in this study do not receive any anti viral therapy as a part of the study, a number of subjects are/have been enrolled in other studies and have received such treatment.

- 42% (n=27) of the sample has been exposed to an Interferon treatment while participating in this study.
- Of those exposed to Interferon treatment, currently,
 - 78% (n=21) show a sustained response to the treatment and currently have undetectable HCV viral loads.
 - 4% (n=1) relapsed after showing initial response to the treatment.

KEY RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Recruitment ongoing, 75/200 patients enrolled with 65 active participants.

REPORTABLE OUTCOMES

None at this time.

CONCLUSIONS

Inferences cannot be made about histological progression of hepatitis C in this population until there is more complete study data including the second liver biopsy. However, an interesting and significant correlation was revealed with respect to genotype and military rank. As more data is obtained, analysis that looks at the other indicators of disease progression such as biochemical markers will also be able to be performed. Additionally, it is hoped that the morbidity and quality of life data will lend insight into an under-researched area of study in this disease process.

REFERENCES

None at this time.

APPENDICES

Not applicable.