

Natural History of Chronic Hepatitis C

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Much controversy surrounds the issue of the natural history of hepatitis C virus (HCV)

Retrospective Studies.

positive.⁷

taneously lost the virus. Among the chronically infected group, 35 (69%) had increased ALT values. Cirrhosis was identified in 4 (8%), all among those with increased ALT values. In contrast, among the 44 anti-HCV-positive per-

blood transfusion might have added to the pathologic process.

Interpretation of Results of Long-Term Follow-Up Evaluation

As described earlier, the frequency of evolution to cir-

type, and viral quasispecies. Viral concentration is an important factor in regard to treatment issues,^{30,31} but there is no evidence to indicate that it has any effect on disease progression.^{32,33} Similarly, viral genotype has profound treatment implications,^{30,31} but most investigators have failed to identify genotype as an indicator of likely progression,^{34,35}

that phlebotomy may be a useful therapy in this subgroup.

Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) is a common disease and may contribute to progression of fibrosis in some patients with both steatohepatitis and hepatitis C.

ies are needed to confirm the potential role of smoking as

tion that has occurred in middle to late adulthood, but the information is inadequate for persons infected as children or in early adulthood. In general, but not invariably, only a small proportion of this latter group has advanced to cirrhosis at the end of the second decade. Knowledge of the frequency and rate of progression among these individuals who have not developed cirrhosis is unknown but is sorely needed. Investigators who have studied these groups in the past should be encouraged to continue care-

ribavirin as initial treatment for chronic hepatitis C. *N Engl J Med* 1998; 339:1485-1492.

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