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Original Article

Hepatitis C virus kinetics during the first phase of pegylated interferon-α-2b with ribavirin therapy in patients with living donor liver transplantation

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Aim: To identify the problems of pegylated interferon (PEG-IFN) with ribavirin therapy against hepatitis C virus (HCV) reinfection in living donor liver transplantation (LDLT) patients. HCV kinetics during the PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy were analyzed in LDLT patients, as well as in chronic hepatitis C (CHC) patients.

Methods: The study included 80 consecutive HCV infected patients undergoing PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy (64 CHC and 16 LDLT patients) who attended the Nagasaki University Hospital for an initial visit between January 2005 and December 2007.

Results: The sustained viral response (VR) rate of the CHC group (80%) was superior

to the LDLT group (22%). The viral disappearance rate of the CHC group was also superior to the LDLT group, regardless of the HCV serotype. The HCV core antigen (cAg) titer under treatment in the LDLT group was more than that of the CHC group from day 0 to week 12. The HCV core antigen (cAg) decrease rate of the LDLT group on the first day of treatment was less than that of the CHC group.

Conclusion: The HCV infection of a transplanted liver is more refractory to treatment than a non-transplanted liver. The low reduction HCV cAg rate on day 1 is one of the problems of the combination therapy.

Key words: chronic hepatitis C, first phase, hepatitis C virus, interferon, living donor liver transplantation

<H1>**INTRODUCTION**

HEPATITIS C VIRUS (HCV) infection is widespread throughout the world. Chronic HCV infection leads to cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. Liver transplantation for HCV-related liver disease has been an option worldwide.[1] Recently, it has been shown that the prognosis for liver transplanted (LT) patients with HCV-related disease deteriorates over time,[2] thus resulting in a poorer outcome than in the non-HCV course.[3] The transplanted liver for HCV-related disease undergoes a rapidly progressive fibrosis and acute graft failure.[3,4] Consequently, anti-HCV treatment after LT is important for the prognosis. Interferon (IFN) has been recognized as the only treatment method for HCV infection. For the transplanted liver, it is known that IFN treatment improves liver fibrosis or halts the progression.[5] Recently, the combination of pegylated IFN (PEG-IFN) with ribavirin was used and produced an excellent result for non-transplanted patients with HCV.[6] However, that was not the case for the HCV re-infected transplanted liver.[7] It is important that the cause of refractory HCV infection in the transplanted liver be more fully clarified. Immunosuppressant therapy, especially

with glucocorticoid, has been speculated to be the cause of the refractory nature of the transplanted liver to IFN.[8,9] The cause of this is considered to be that glucocorticoid downregulated the IFN signal transduction in the hepatocytes.[8] The authors recently found that calcineurin inhibitors also inhibited IFN induced STAT-1 phosphorylation and antiviral activity in the HCV replicon system.[10] Therefore, the problem of IFN signaling in the hepatocyte induced an IFN refractory condition[11] and decreased the first phase of HCV decline, which was IFN induced HCV decay during the first day of IFN treatment.[12]

In the present study, we attempted to better understand PEG-IFN and ribavirin therapy by comparing patients with chronic hepatitis from HCV infection (CHC) with living donor LT (LDLT) patients. When the non-transplanted CHC patients were used as a reference against the HCV reinfected LDLT patients, we expected that the differences in the clinical data in the two groups would help to clarify the problem of IFN refractory HCV infection, and shed light on the analysis of HCV kinetics under IFN and ribavirin treatment, and to elucidate the damaged segment of the IFN induced antiviral mechanism in the LDLT condition.

<H1>**PATIENTS AND METHODS**

<H2>**Patients**

THE PRESENT RESEARCH is a prospective study. The study included 80 consecutive HCV-infected patients undergoing PEG-IFN with ribavirin combination therapy (64 CHC and 16 LDLT patients) who attended the Nagasaki University Hospital for an initial visit between January 2005 and December 2007. All patients received the targeted dose of 1.5 μg/kg PEG-IFN-α-2b (Pegintron; Schering-Prough K.K., Osaka, Japan) once weekly with daily ribavirin (Rebetol; Schering-Plough K.K., Osaka, Japan) for a total dose of 600 mg (bodyweight < 60 kg), 800 mg

(60 kg < bodyweight < 80 kg) or 1000 mg (bodyweight > 80 kg) according to bodyweight (BW). The number of patients who were judged to have obtained a curative effect from IFN therapy was 42 in total and 12 in LDLT patients. If the HCV-RNA had been negative in the patient serum until 12 weeks after the initiation of treatment or positive at 24 weeks, PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy was stopped at week 48. If the HCV-RNA had been negative from weeks 12 to 24, PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy was continued for 24 weeks to a predetermined 48 weeks. CHC patients were diagnosed on the basis of a persistently raised alanine aminotransferase (ALT) level and biopsy proven disease. All LDLT patients, who had undergone liver transplantation for HCV related cirrhosis at Nagasaki University Hospital from June 2002 to May 2007, had the HCV-RNA in their serum at the commencement of PEG-IFN with ribavirin treatment. To prevent HCV related hepatitis after liver transplantation, pre-emptive therapy using IFN is the strategy used at the Nagasaki University Hospital. After the recovery of the general condition without ascites and icterus after transplantation, and establishment of the diagnosis using the liver biopsy, PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy was started. The interval between LDLT and IFN treatment was a mean of 281 days (range 16–989 days). Tacrolimus (Astellas, Tokyo, Japan) an immunosuppressive agent, was used together with steroids for all LDLT patients as the induction therapy. When IFN therapy was commenced, tacrolimus was switched to cyclosporine (Novartis, Tokyo, Japan) in 12/16 cases. A percutaneous liver biopsy assisted by ultrasonography was carried out in all cases. Liver histology was evaluated according to the degree of fibrosis and necroinflammatory activity.[13] The extent of fibrosis (staging) was classified as follows: F1 (periportal expansion), F2 (portoportal septa), F3 (portocentral linkage or bridging fibrosis) and F4 (cirrhosis). The necroinflammatory activity (grading) was classified as follows: A1 (mild), A2

(moderate) and A3 (severe). Liver biopsy specimens were fixed in 10% formalin, embedded in paraffin, cut to a thickness of 4 μm, and subjected to hematoxylin–eosin and Azan–Mallory staining.

<H2>**Hepatitis C virus kinetics assessment**

We compared the HCV viral load in both groups, determined by the HCV core antigen (cAg), at baseline (D0), day 1 (D1), week 1 (W1), week 2 (W2), week 4 (W4), week 8 (W8), week 12 (W12), week 24 (W24) and week 48 (W48). The HCV viral serotype (ST) and HCV core antigen (cAg) were determined using available kits. In this assay, HCV serotypes 1 and 2 correspond to genotypes 1 and 2 of Simmonds' classification,[14] respectively. The HCV cAg correlates with HCV-RNA by quantitative PCR.[15] HCV cAg was measured at the indicated times and HCV-RNA qualitative PCR, the amplicor monitor method, was used after the level was under the detection range of HCV cAg in every month. In the present study, we proposed the calculation of the decreased HCV viral load during PEG-IFN with ribavirin treatment and set as follows: a negative HCV cAg was 20 fmol/L and a negative HCV-RNA qualitative PCR was 1 fmol/L.

<H2>**Clinical and laboratory measurements**

The body mass index (BMI) was calculated as weight (kg) divided by the square of height (m). Subjects fasted overnight before blood samples were obtained. Venous plasma glucose was measured with an automated analyzer, and basal serum insulin was measured using a standard radioimmunoassay. The index of insulin resistance and β-cell function was calculated using the fasting value of plasma glucose (we excluded the patients with greater than 130 mg/dL), and the serum insulin level according to the homeostasis model assessment (HOMA) method. HOMA-IR, an insulin resistance marker, is calculated as follows: fasting plasma glucose × fasting insulin/405. HOMA-β, a β-cell function marker, was calculated as follows: 360 × fasting

insulin/(fasting plasma glucose-63).[16] White blood cell, red blood cell, platelet, hemoglobin A1c, ALT, aspartate aminotransferase (AST), γ-GTP, total cholesterol (TC), triglyceride (TG), Low density lipoprotein (LDL), High density lipoprotein (HDL), free fatty acid (FFA), and ferritin were determined by standard hematometry and laboratory techniques.

<H2>**Statistical analysis**

The data were processed on a personal computer and analyzed using StatView 5.0 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA). Differences between groups were analyzed by Mann–Whitney *U*-test and Pearson χ^2-test. All data in the text and tables are shown as means, unless otherwise indicated. The statistical analysis of the HCV-RNA disappearance rate was by the Kaplan–Meier method with Wilcoxon assay. Values of $P < 0.05$ were considered to be statistically significant.

<H1>**RESULTS**

<H2>**Differences of patient characteristics**

FIRST, THE PRETREATMENT clinical and laboratory characteristics were compared with All-CHC and All-LDLT patients (Table 1). The BW and BMI in the All-CHC group were higher than that of the All-LDLT group. Therefore, the levels of PEG-IFN dose per BW and ribavirin dose per BW were even, but the levels of PEG-IFN dose and ribavirin dose in the all LDLT group were lower than in the All-CHC group. The HCV viral load in the all LDLT group was greater than that in the All-CHC group and serotype 1 was the majority in the All-LDLT group. In hematology and laboratory data, the red blood cell count and hemoglobin in the All-LDLT group was lower than that of the All-CHC group, and the FFA level was higher in the All-LDLT group. In the histological examination, fibrosis is more advanced in the All-CHC group than in the All-LDLT group. There was the tendency toward higher levels of fasting plasma

glucose and lower levels of HOMA-β in the All-LDLT group than in the All-CHC group. Next, we targeted the serotype 1 and a high HCV titer (ST1H group) above 100 KIU/L by the qualitative PCR method or 300 fmol/L of the cAg assay. These were examined in the same way (Table 2). The ST1H group might have shown the same result as the All group, except the levels of fasting plasma glucose and HOMA-β did not differ with ST1H-CHC and ST1H-LDLT. The mean value of fasting plasma glucose (FPG) was higher than the normal range in the LDLT group. The discontinuance rates of treatment were almost equal, 19 cases (29.7%) and 4 cases (25%) in All-CHC and All-LDLT, respectively. The reasons for discontinuance were adverse effects in All-LDLT patients and the refractory nature of viral response in two All-CHC patients.

<H2>**The HCV infection in the LDLT group is more obstinate than in the CHC group**

The response rate and cure rate of PEG-IFN with ribavirin therapy were compared with both groups (Table 2A, All group and B, ST1H group). The HCV response rate to treatment, viral response (VR), was determined by the disappearance of HCV-RNA or by the decline of HCV cAg to less than 1/100 before treatment. The cure rate, sustained viral response rate (SVR), was determined by a negative HCV-RNA by qualitative PCR method at 6 months post-termination of treatment. The VR rate at 8 and 12 weeks, but not at 4 weeks, and the PP-SVR in the LDLT group (Table 3A,B) was worse than that in the CHC group. Non-viral responders, who did not achieve HCV-RNA negativity during the treatment, did not show statistical significance in either SG1H group (Table 3B). As a result, we calculated the prediction of the lack of SVR by non-viral response in the LDLT group. The sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive values and negative predictive value were 1, 0, 0.917 and the acalculia for null viral

responders at 24 h, 0.7, 1, 1 and 0.25 at 4 weeks, 0.6, 1, 1 and 0.2 at 8 weeks, 0.6, 1, 1 and 0.2 at 12 weeks, respectively.

The disappearance rate of HCV-RNA was evaluated by the Kaplan–Meier method (Fig. 1 ST1H group). The disappearance rate in the LDLT group was statistically lower than the CHC group. Before 14 weeks after the initiation of treatment, the HCV-RNA disappearance case was not apparent in the ST1H group (Fig. 1).

<H2>**The decline of HCV load, especially early phase, is blocked in the LDLT group**

For the analysis of viral kinetics, we evaluated the decline of the HCV load and the decline rate after treatment with particular emphasis of the early phase of treatment, including D1-W12. In the ST1H group (Fig. 2), the decreased rate on D1 in the LDLT group was statistically lower than CHC (Fig. 2b) and the viral load of the LDLT group was larger than that in CHC from D0 to W12 (Fig. 2a). The decreased rate at the indicated time without D1 and W12 was not the difference between CHC and LDLT (Fig. 2b). We next analyzed the SG1H-group that matched the pre-treatment HCV cAg titer (Fig. 3). In a similar fashion to Figure 2, the viral load of the matched LDLT group was larger than that of the matched CHC from D1 to W12 (Fig. 3a) and the decreased rate of the matched LDLT group was lower than that of the matched CHC at D1, W2 and W4 (Fig. 3b).

<H1>**DISCUSSION**

IN THE PRESENT prospective study, we compared CHC and LDLT patients treated with PEG-IFN and ribavirin for HCV infection. BMI, HCV cAg, red blood cell, γ-GTP, FFA and liver fibrosis in the pretreatment clinical characteristics were different in both groups (Tables 1,2). The VR rate of the CHC group was superior to that of the LDLT group, and the SVR by per-protocol analysis was also similar in result to the VR

(Table 3). The viral disappearance rate of the CHC group was superior to the LDLT group, regardless of the HCV serotype (Fig. 1). The HCV cAg titer under the treatment in the LDLT group was more than that of the CHC group from D0 to W12 (Figs 2a,3a) and the HCV cAg decrease rate of the LDLT group at the D1 was less than that of the CHC group (Figs 2b,3b). We showed that the reinfected HCV to the graft liver was more refractory than the non-transplanted CHC. The PEG-IFN and ribavirin dose per BW was an equal dose in both groups. However, it was difficult to determine the pretreatment predictive factors for the LDLT cases, because only one case showed SVR in the LDLT group. Thus, we considered that the difference of the pretreatment clinical characteristics in both groups might be related to the refractory HCV infection.

The pretreated HCV cAg titer is known to be the principal factor for IFN resistance. For CHC and LDLT patients, a high HCV-RNA titer in the pretreatment sera is associated with non-responder status for IFN treatment.[7,17] In the LDLT condition, the HCV-RNA titer was rapidly increased after immediately decreasing at transplant and the viral load after several weeks post-LDLT exceeded the value of pre-LDLT.[18] The HCV-RNA titer increased rapidly in patients receiving corticosteroids as part of the immunosuppressant regimen.[18,19] We have speculated that the massive amount of HCV, caused by immunosuppressant therapy after the LDLT, was part of the reason for the IFN refractory status. However, comparisons with the pretreated HCV cAg matched groups (Fig. 3) showed the existence of an important factor other than the pretreatment viral load. It will, therefore, be necessary to analyze this problem by evaluating many factors, for example immunosuppressants[10] and regeneration, in the future.

A high level of γ-GTP was also known to be an important factor for IFN treatment.[7,17] Usually, high levels of γ-GTP and FFA have been linked to insulin resistance.[20,21] Therefore, insulin resistance in the liver is assumed in the condition of

IFN resistance. However, the LDLT group had the normal range of HOMA-IR,[16] which was lower than that of the CHC group (Tables 1,2). The HCV infection after liver transplantation is associated with insulin resistance.[22] Immunosuppressants, especially corticosteroids, induced insulin resistance.[23] In the present study, the LDLT group had a disturbance of insulin secretion rather than insulin resistance and high levels of FPG might be caused by the disturbance of insulin secretion. Therefore, further study is necessary to clarify the relationship between the glucose metabolism and the IFN resistance in LDLT patients. The levels of γ-GTP rise at cholestatic conditions. It was reported that the presence of a cholestatic profile is associated with an adverse response to IFN treatment in LT.[7] A cholestatic profile provoked the TH2-like lymphocyte response.[19] The authors have previously reported that IL-10, representative of TH2 cytokine, inhibits IFN signaling through inducible suppressor of cytokine signaling (SOCS).[24] The high levels of FFA were induced by a catabolic state, such as cirrhosis, and were not fully recovered after LDLT. As a result, the levels of FFA reflected a continuous catabolic state at the beginning of IFN treatment. FFA can induce oxidative stress in various cells,[25,26] and inhibit the IFN induced antiviral gene induction through the inactivation of Jak-1 and Tyk-2.[27] Therefore, we are speculating that high levels of γ-GTP and FFA in the LDLT group have the ability to inhibit IFN signaling as much as in the CHC patients.

We are paying attention to the viral decline of D1/D0 (Figs 2b,3b). The decreased rate of D1 is named as the first phase of HCV decline and is the predictor of SVR.[28,29] The first phase influenced the second phase, which is the decline of HCV after D2.[28] The IFN induced antiviral gene products were considered to be very important for antiviral activity.[11] The expressions of the IFN stimulating genes (ISG) were associated with the early phase of the decline[11] and it was reported that the lack of ISG caused

early liver fibrosis in the LT patients with HCV.[30] In the LDLT group, the reduced HCV cAg decreased the rate of D1 and this might be part of the cause of being IFN resistance. We speculate that an IFN signaling disturbance, related to high levels of γ-GTP and FFA, might have triggered the adverse effect to the HCV cAg decreased rate of D1.

In summary, it became clear that the viral response and SVR is worse in the LDLT group. The first phase of viral decay, the decreased rate of D1/D0, also declined in the LDLT group. High levels of γ-GTP and FFA in the pretreatment sera might also be related to IFN-signaling damage in hepatocytes. At the initiation of pre-emptive therapy, HCV had also been increasing in the graft liver and the catabolic status of energy did not recover for the relatively small size of the graft liver. When beginning treatment for an HCV infection after LT, we should carefully take into account the timing of IFN initiation, in addition to the types of immunosuppressants used.

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Figure 1 The difference in the HCV-RNA disappearance rate between chronic the hepatitis C (CHC) group and living donated liver transplantation (LDLT) group during 48 weeks of treatment. HCV-RNA was evaluated by the qualitative PCR method. The disappearance rate was calculated as follows: serum HCV-RNA disappearance case number/all cases in indicated time. The statistical analysis was carried out using the Kaplan–Meier method with the Wilcoxon assay. ST1H group was plotted as the HCV-RNA disappearance line between the white circle of the LDLT group and the

black circle of the CHC group. In all cases and the ST1H group, the disappearance rate was statistically significant between the CHC group and the LDLT group ($P < 0.05$).

Figure 2 Comparison of viral kinetics between the SG1H-CHC group and the SG1H-LDLT group during the 48 weeks of treatment. (a) The HCV core antigen load and (b) reduction rates were plotted by a straight line (SG1H-CHC group), and dotted line (SG1H-LDLT group). The error bar represented the standard deviation. On the *y*-axis, D0 is pretreatment, D1 and WX is time post-treatment day 1 and week X, respectively. The reduction rate was calculated as follows: $\log_{10}$HCV cAg load in indicated time/in D0. HCV cAg titer at the indicated time between SG1H-CHC and SG1H-LDLT were compared. The asterisk mark indicates a significant difference, $P < 0.05$, calculated by Mann–Whitney *U*-test.

Figure 3 Comparison of viral kinetics between matched pretreatment HCV cAg ST1H-CHC group and ST1H-LDLT group during 48 weeks of treatment. (a) HCV core antigen load and (b) reduction rate were plotted by a straight line (matched SG1H-CHC group) and dotted line (matched SG1H-LDLT group). The error bar represents the standard deviation. The asterisk mark is the significant difference, $P < 0.05$, calculated by Mann–Whitney *U*-test.

Table 1 Difference of characteristics between all chronic hepatitis C cases and all living donor liver transplantation cases

Characteristics	All-CHC ($n = 64$)	All-LDLT ($n = 16$)	*P*-value
Age (years)	58 ± 10.8	58.8 ± 4.62	NS
Sex (male : female)	36:28	7:9	NS
Height (m)	1.60 ± 0.098	1.583 ± 0.010	NS
Bodyweight (kg)	61.0 ± 11.0	54.8 ± 8.52	0.025
Body mass index	23.6 ± 2.94	21.8 ± 2.30	0.022

PEG-IFN dose (μg)	80.1 ± 18.7	71.9 ± 33.5	0.035
PEG-IFN/BW	1.31 ± 0.304	1.35 ± 0.708	NS
Ribavirin dose (mg)	621.9 ± 151.7	525 ± 100	0.030
Ribavirin/BW	10.2 ± 2.23	9.72 ± 2.04	NS
Serotype (1:2)	45:17	15:1	0.081
HCV cAg (fmol/L)	5773 ± 5609	23144 ± 21059	0.001
WBC (/μL)	5006.3 ± 1335	5918.8 ± 2439	NS
RBC (10^4/μL)	445 ± 41.1	350 ± 56.7	<0.0001
Hemoglobin (g/dL)	13.8 ± 1.06	10.9 ± 1.85	<0.0001
Platelet (10^4/μL)	16.4 ± 4.48	18.5 ± 10.6	NS
AST (U/L)	62.9 ± 35	64.3 ± 37.2	NS
ALT (U/L)	85 ± 53.0	89.9 ± 57.1	NS
γ-GTP (U/L)	62.1 ± 56.5	138.9 ± 129.1	0.013
Ferritin (ng/dL)	218 ± 216	254 ± 259	NS
TC (mg/dL)	169.8 ± 26.6	167.3 ± 38.8	NS
TG (mg/dL)	105.3 ± 46.8	122.8 ± 44.8	0.069
HDL (mg/dL)	45.2 ± 11.9	46.6 ± 14.9	NS
LDL (mg/dL)	97.3 ± 24.3	88.8 ± 26.7	NS
FFA (mEq/L)	0.492 ± 0.261	0.686 ± 0.299	0.019
FPG (mg/dL)	91.9 ± 15.4	125.1 ± 56.9	0.090
Insulin (mIU/L)	9.16 ± 5.1	8.34 ± 5.16	NS
HOMA-IR	2.08 ± 1.22	1.75 ± 1.42	NS
HOMA-β	135.4 ± 86.2	89.7 ± 86.9	0.075
Fibrosis	1.86 ± 1.18	0.875 ± 0.806	0.004

Activity	1.03 ± 0.48	1.31 ± 0.48	0.067

Data are shown as the means ± standard deviation and values, with statistical analysis calculated by Mann–Whitney *U*-test for means and Pearson's χ^2-test for values.

Normal values in laboratory tests: ALT (IU/L), 5–40; AST (IU/L), 10–40; γ-GTP (IU/L), <70 in males, <30 in females; TC (mg/dL), 150–219; TG (mg/dL), 50–149; FFA (mEq/L), 0.14–0.85; LDL (mg/dL), 70–139; HDL (mg/dL), 40–86 in male, 40–96 in female; hemoglobin (g/dL), 13.5–17.6 in male, 11.3–15.2 in female; WBC (/μL), 3900–9800 in males, 3500–9100 in females; RBC (10^4/μL), 427–570 in males, 376–500 in females; ferritin (mg/dL), 27–320 in males, 3.4–89 in females; platelet (10^4/μL), 13.1–36.2 in males, 13–36.9 in females; insulin (IU/L), 3.06–16.9; FPG (mg/L), 70–109. HOMA-IR, HOMA-β, and BMI are described in the text.

ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CHC, chronic hepatitis C; FFA, free fatty acid; FPG, fasting plasma glucose; HCV cAg, hepatitis C virus core antigen; HDL, high density lipoprotein; HOMA, homeostasis model assessment; LDL, low density lipoprotein; LDLT, living donor liver transplantation; PEG-IFN, pegylated interferon; RBC, red blood cell count; TC, total cholesterol; TG, triglyceride; WBC, white blood cell count.

Table 2 Difference of characteristics of serotype 1 and high virus titer between chronic hepatitis C patients and living donor liver transplantation patients

Characteristics	ST1H-CHC (*n* = 42)	ST1H-LDLT (*n* = 15)	*P*-value
Age (years)	58.5 ± 10.8	58.8 ± 4.78	NS
Sex (male : female)	22:20	6:9	NS
Height (m)	1.60 ± 0.10	1.566 ± 0.081	NS
Bodyweight (kg)	61.8 ± 12.1	53.8 ± 7.69	0.02

Body mass index	24.0 ± 2.78	21.9 ± 2.37	0.012
PEG-IFN dose (μg)	81.4 ± 19.5	73.3 ± 34.2	0.052
PEG-IFN/BW	1.33 ± 0.269	1.39 ± 0.711	NS
Ribavirin dose (mg)	642.8 ± 150.0	520 ± 101.4	0.011
Ribavirin/BW	10.5 ± 2.13	9.80 ± 2.08	NS
HCV cAg (fmol/L)	6969 ± 5281	24674 ± 20856	0.003
WBC (/μL)	5019.0 ± 1294	6033.8 ± 2479	NS
RBC (10^4/μL)	444 ± 40.1	351 ± 58.6	<0.0001
Hemoglobin (g/dL)	13.9 ± 1.10	10.8 ± 1.88	<0.0001
Platelet (10^4/μL)	16.7 ± 4.68	18.9 ± 10.8	NS
AST (U/L)	62.1 ± 31.6	64.2 ± 38.5	NS
ALT (U/L)	84.5 ± 51.8	88.0 ± 58.6	NS
γ-GTP (U/L)	64.0 ± 61.7	113.6 ± 83.1	0.036
Ferritin (ng/dL)	206 ± 164.8	204.5 ± 188.4	NS
TC (mg/dL)	172.6 ± 25.7	165.3 ± 39.2	NS
TG (mg/dL)	108.2 ± 52.2	122.9 ± 46.4	NS
HDL (mg/dL)	46.5 ± 11.9	45.4 ± 14.8	NS
LDL (mg/dL)	97.7 ± 25.4	88.6 ± 27.8	NS
FFA (mEq/L)	0.514 ± 0.251	0.693 ± 0.310	0.049
FPG (mg/dL)	92.4 ± 16.4	123.7 ± 58.6	NS
Insulin (mIU/L)	9.06 ± 5.5	8.34 ± 5.16	NS
HOMA-IR	2.07 ± 1.31	1.86 ± 1.38	NS
HOMA-b	128.0 ± 76.2	95.7 ± 86.5	NS
Fibrosis	1.92 ± 1.19	0.933 ± 0.799	0.008

Activity	1.08 ± 0.474	1.33 ± 0.488	0.098

Data are shown as the means ± standard deviation and values, with statistical analysis calculated by Mann–Whitney *U*-test for means and Pearson's χ^2-test for values.

Normal values in laboratory tests are same as in Table 1.

ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CHC, chronic hepatitis C; FFA, free fatty acid; FPG, fasting plasma glucose; HCV cAg, hepatitis C virus core antigen; HDL, high density lipoprotein; HOMA, homeostasis model assessment; LDL, low density lipoprotein; LDLT, living donor liver transplantation; PEG-IFN, pegylated interferon; RBC, red blood cell count; TC, total cholesterol; TG, triglyceride; WBC, white blood cell count.

Table 3 Result of pegylated interferon-α-2b plus ribavirin therapy

A. All cases

Term	All-CHC	All-LDLT	*P*-value
Viral response 4 weeks	40/60 (67%)	5/12 (42%)	NS
Viral response 8 weeks	47/55 (85%)	6/12 (50%)	0.011
Viral response 12 weeks	43/48 (90%)	6/12 (50%)	0.003
Sustained viral response: ITT	20/42 (45%)	2/12 (20%)	0.054
Sustained viral response: PP	20/28 (80%)	2/9 (22%)	0.008

B. Serotype 1 and high virus titer cases

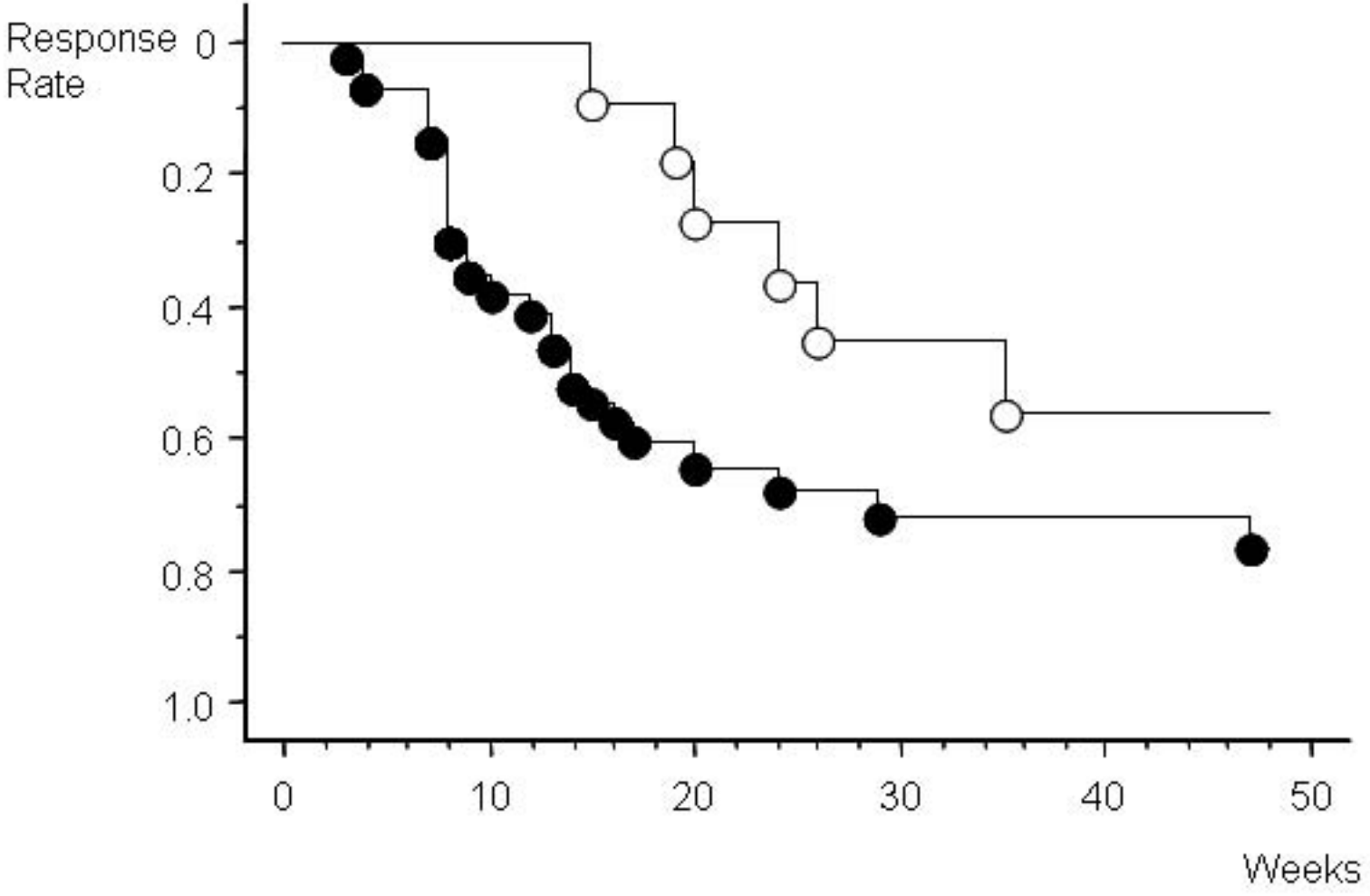
Term	ST1H-CHC	ST1H-LDLT	*P*-value
Viral response 4 weeks	24/40 (67%)	5/11 (45%)	NS
Viral response 8 weeks	30/36 (83%)	5/11 (45%)	0.012
Viral response 12 weeks	25/29 (86%)	5/11 (45%)	0.008
Sustained viral response: ITT	8/27 (30%)	1/11 (8%)	NS

Sustained viral response: PP	8/15 (53%)	1/9 (11%)	0.029
Non-virological respons: ITT	11/27 (41%)	5/11 (45%)	NS
Non-virological respons: PP	4/15 (27%)	4/9 (44%)	NS

Data are shown as relevant numbers/target case numbers (percentage of relevant numbers) with statistical analysis using Pearson's χ^2-test for numbers.

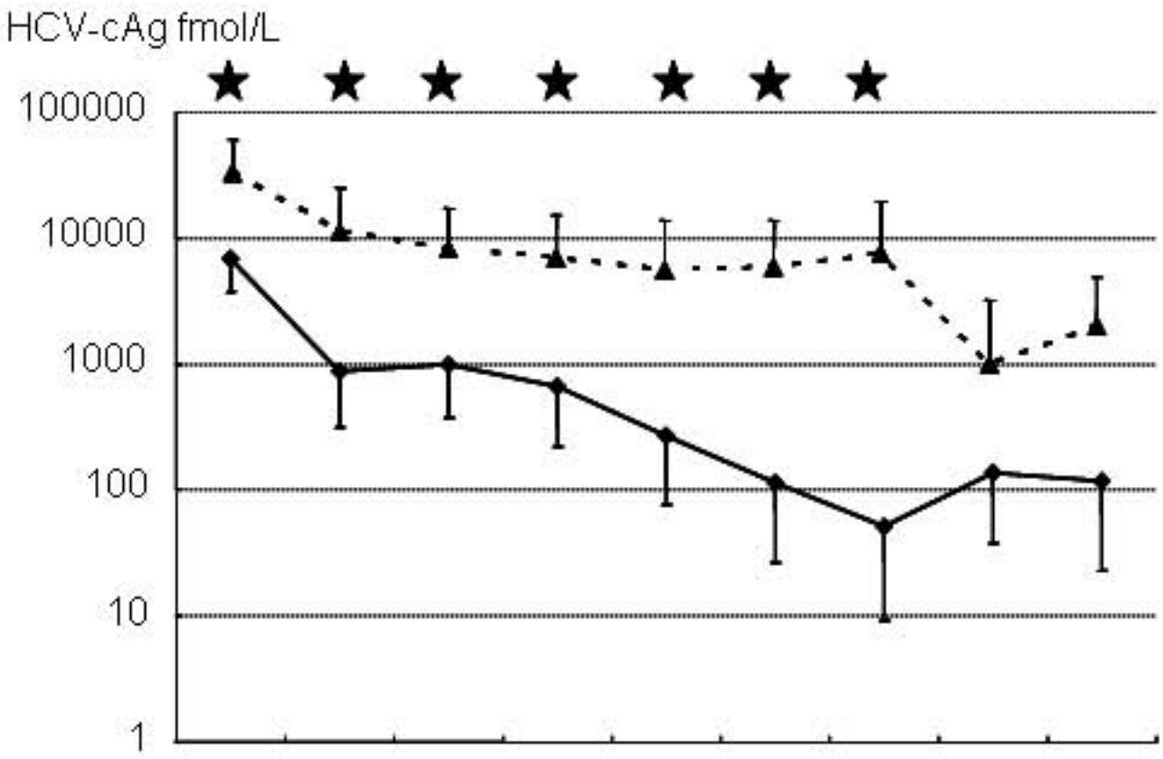
CHC, chronic hepatitis C; ITT, intention to treatment analysis; LDLT, living donor liver transplantation; PP, per-protocol analysis.

Serotype 1 and high virus titter



Ichikawa T. Figure 1

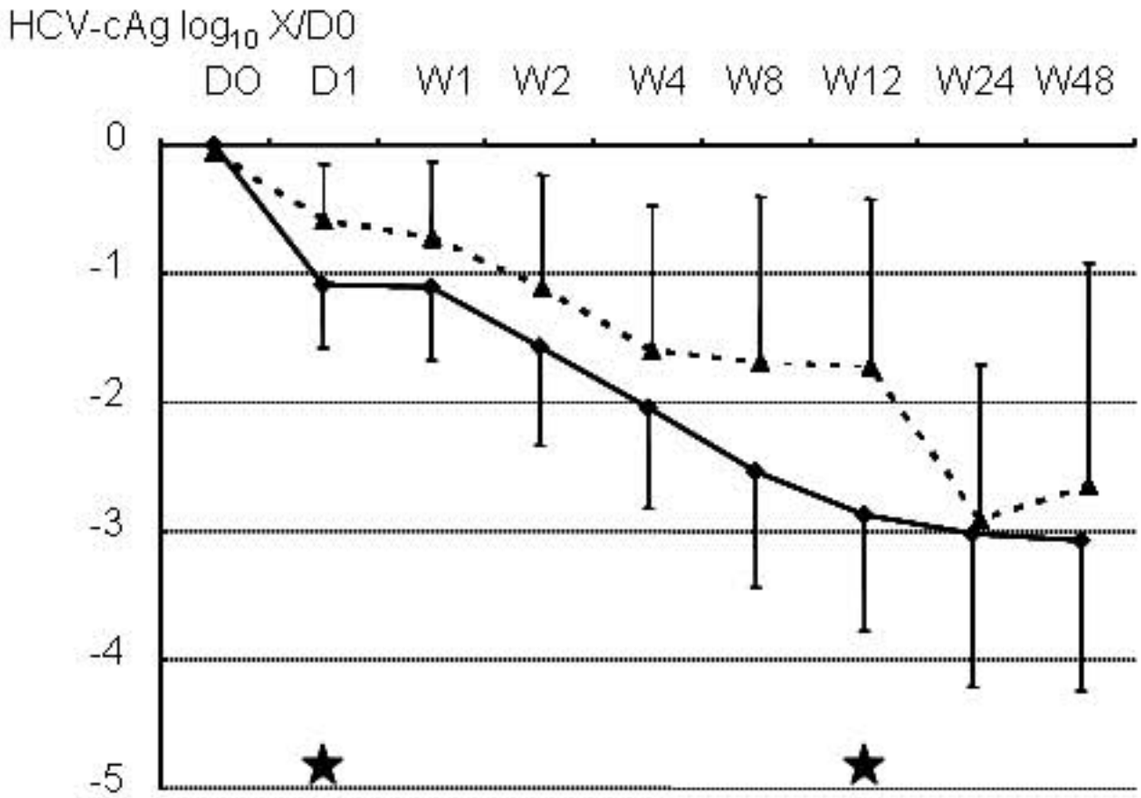
A



	D0	D1	W1	W2	W4	W8	W12	W24	W48
LDLT	15	14	14	13	11	11	11	10	9
CHC	42	42	41	41	40	36	29	25	15

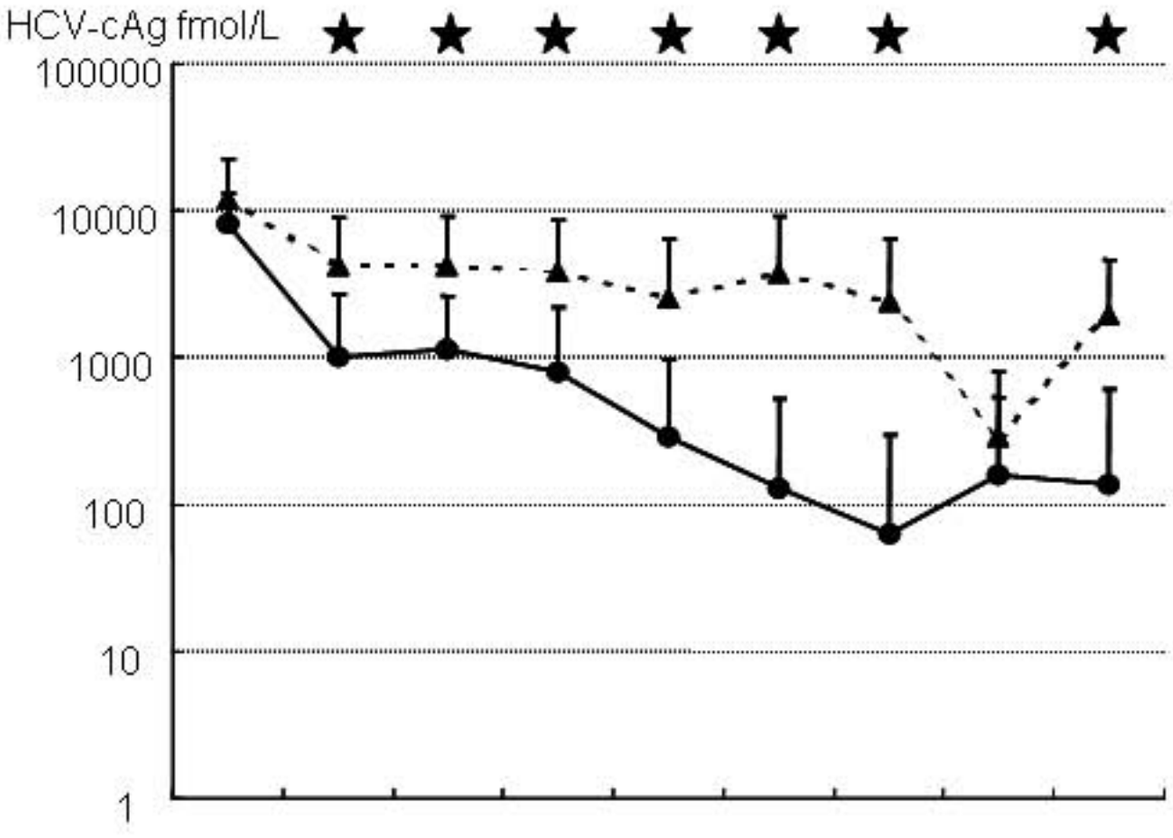
Case number

B



Ichikawa T. Figure 2

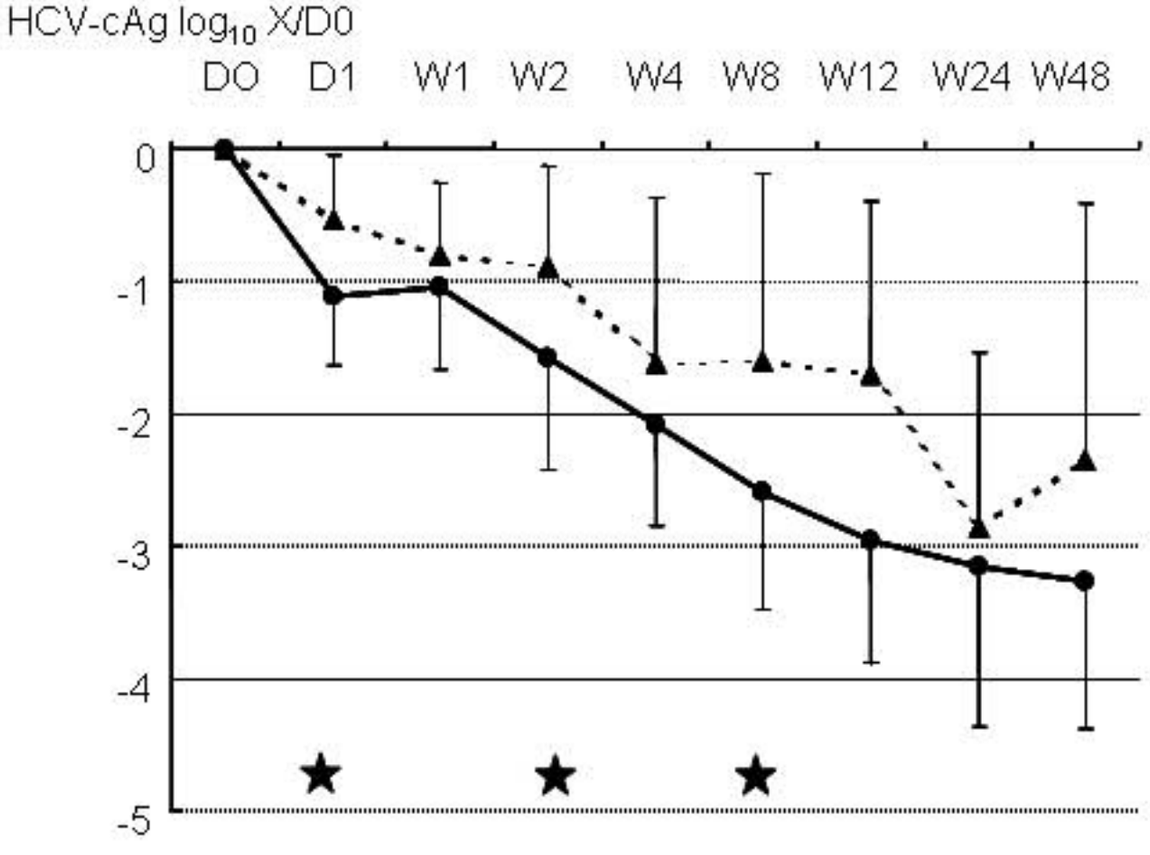
A



	D0	D1	W1	W2	W4	W8	W12	W24	W48
LDLT	10	10	10	9	7	7	7	6	5
CHC	35	34	33	34	33	30	23	21	16

Case number

B



Ichikawa T. Figure 3