



## Antiviral effect of ribavirin in early non-responders to interferon monotherapy assessed by kinetics of hepatitis C virus RNA and hepatitis C virus core antigen

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**BACKGROUND/AIMS:** To evaluate the efficacy of ribavirin, given in second intention in non-responders to interferon alone, by studying viral kinetics.  
**METHODS:** We conducted a trial including 203 patients with chronic hepatitis C, naïve of treatment. Patients were treated with interferon three times a week with or without ribavirin and amantadine according to response. Viral kinetics were assessed by serial measurements of HCV RNA (bDNA 3.0 and Monitor 2.0) and a new assay, trak-C, able to quantify total Hepatitis C virus (HCV) core antigen.  
**RESULTS:** A significant initial drop in HCV RNA or HCV core antigen, under interferon alone, was associated with response to therapy,  $-4.85 \pm 1.33$  log for HCV RNA in sustained responders versus  $-1.86 \pm 1.53$  log for others groups,  $P < 0.001$ . In patients receiving ribavirin in second intention, we also observed a similar drop in HCV RNA and HCV core antigen, predictive of sustained response,  $-2.67 \pm 1.26$  log for HCV RNA in sustained responders versus  $-0.44 \pm 0.49$  log in non-responders,  $P < 0.001$ .  
**CONCLUSIONS:** Ribavirin has probably an additional antiviral effect in interferon treated patients. Kinetics of HCV RNA and HCV core antigen under treatment are highly predictive of a sustained virological response.

Résumé en anglais

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