LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Alpha-fetoprotein in chronic hepatitis C

We read with great interest the article in the Journal of the Formosan Medical Society by Tai et al., reporting a retrospective study of 654 patients with chronic hepatitis C (CHC) and no evidence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) (as judged from imaging studies at enrolment), in which they examined the association of an elevated alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) concentration with CHC. In multivariate analyses, the authors identified age, histological activity index (HAI) inflammation score, serum alanine aminotransferase (ALT), and platelet count as significant correlates of elevated AFP concentration, and hepatitis C virus (HCV) genotype 1b, platelet count, aspartate aminotransferase (AST), and AFP concentration, as significant correlates of advanced liver fibrosis. These findings are interesting and provide additional information to this area of active investigation, but several issues deserve further discussion.

First, insulin resistance and metabolic derangements have been linked to severity of liver histology, such as hepatic steatosis, fibrosis progression and HCC. In addition, age, sex, obesity, alcohol consumption, diabetes mellitus and hyperlipidemia, and the medication history, may affect host metabolism and lead to liver fibrosis progression in CHC patients. Therefore, it would be more informative if the authors could provide information regarding metabolic factors in their patients.

Second, as elevation of the AFP concentration is identified as an important predictor for liver fibrosis in this study, it remains unclear whether metabolic factors may also contribute to this elevation. Prospective large-scale studies with complete data are required to examine the complex relationships between clinical variables, AFP concentration and liver fibrosis.

References


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