

Figure 3 Cumulative survival rate of groups A, B, C, and D according to age at hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) diagnosis. Kaplan-Meier curves showing the survival rate stratified by age at HCC diagnosis. There were no significant differences in the survival rate among the four groups. —, A group (\leq 60 years, n = 36); —, B group (61–70 years, n = 115); —, C group (71–80 years, n = 143); —, D group (> 80 years, n = 29).

We previously reported that the average integration value of ALT was associated with the cumulative incidence of hepatocarcinogenesis and that minimizing ALT is necessary for the prevention of hepatocarcinogenesis.²⁰ In addition, we demonstrated a 6.242-fold higher (95% confidence interval: 1.499-25.987) cumulative incidence of hepatocarcinogenesis in patients with average ALT integration values between 20 and 40 IU/L (within the current normal range) than in patients with 20 IU/L or below.²¹ In this study, the average integration value of ALT significantly decreased as the age at HCC diagnosis increased. Especially in group D, the average integration value of ALT was 44.9 IU/L (range, 22.7-91.9 IU/L), which is near the upper limit of the conventional reference range of ALT (40 IU/L). There was the same tendency in control patients; however, average integration values of ALT were lower in control patients than HCC patients in each corresponding age group. These data suggest close surveillance for HCC is important even if older patients (≥ 65 years) have low ALT values.

It is likely that low platelet counts account for a large proportion of patients with cirrhosis, consistent with the theory that HCC develops in patients with progressive or advanced liver disease. Cirrhosis is an established risk factor for HCC in patients with HCV.^{22,23} It is generally accepted that platelet count is a surrogate marker of liver fibrosis.^{24,25} Platelet counts were highest in group D, both at the start of follow-up and at the time of HCC diagnosis. In contrast, there were no differences in platelet counts among control patients without HCC. It is particularly worth noting that group D had the smallest annual decline in platelet count, at levels comparable to the control patients. A previous report showed that the rate of progression of fibrosis to cirrhosis was accelerated by aging.²⁴ The precise mechanism of this discrepancy is uncertain. Probably, differences in patient selection might account for this discrepancy. We hypothesize that in our study, the increased rate of

annual decline in platelet count may be linked to accelerated carcinogenesis occurring in the younger patients. Group D also had the lowest values of AFP, which is considered a marker of hepatic regeneration as well as a HCC tumor marker in viral hepatitis. ²⁶ Taken together, this suggests a weaker inflammatory response in older patients. Further investigation is necessary.

Why do elderly patients progress to HCC even though liver function appears stable? Aging is associated with a number of events at the molecular, cellular, and physiological level that influence carcinogenesis and subsequent cancer growth.²² Age may be considered as a progressive loss of stress tolerance due to declines in the functional reserve of multiple organ systems.²⁷ It has been hypothesized that age-associated declines in DNA repair²⁸ contribute to the development of HCC. The precise relationship between aging and hepatocarcinogenesis remains uncertain. Further assessment of the role of aging in the progression of HCV is needed.

We found no difference in tumor stage among the four groups. The younger groups A and B tended to receive curative therapy more often than the older groups C and D. However, there were no significant differences in survival. We hypothesize that this is due to the aggressive multiple treatments received by elderly patients with good liver function.

One limitation of our study is that histological confirmation was available in only 234 patients (36.2%). However, it is not practical to perform biopsies on all patients because of potential complications. Lu *et al.* reported that the best cutoff platelet count for the diagnosis of cirrhosis is $150 \times 10^3 \text{ /mm}^3.^{29}$ Therefore, we employed platelet count as a surrogate marker of liver fibrosis in this study.

In conclusion, we demonstrated that elderly HCV-positive patients (≥ 65 years old) with low ALT values developed HCC regardless of their platelet counts. This finding should be taken into account when designating the most suitable HCC surveillance protocol. The optimal screening interval for HCV-infected patients aged 65 years older should be three to four months like cirrhotic patients even in the absence of cirrhosis.

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Effect of nucleos(t)ide analogue therapy on hepatocarcinogenesis in chronic hepatitis B patients: A propensity score analysis

Takashi Kumada^{1,*}, Hidenori Toyoda¹, Toshifumi Tada¹, Seiki Kiriyama¹, Makoto Tanikawa¹, Yasuhiro Hisanaga¹, Akira Kanamori¹, Takurou Niinomi¹, Satoshi Yasuda¹, Yusuke Andou¹, Kenta Yamamoto¹, Junko Tanaka²

¹Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Ogaki Municipal Hospital, Ogaki, Japan; ²Department of Epidemiology, Infectious Disease Control and Prevention, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan

Background & Aims: Some patients with chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection progress to hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). However, the long-term effect of nucleos(t)ide analogue (NA) therapy on progression to HCC is unclear.

Methods: Therefore, we compared chronic hepatitis B patients who received NA therapy to those who did not, using a propensity analysis.

Results: Of 785 consecutive HBV carriers between 1998 and 2008, 117 patients who received NA therapy and 117 patients who did not, were selected by eligibility criteria and propensity score matching. Factors associated with the development of HCC were analyzed. In the follow-up period, HCC developed in 57 of 234 patients (24.4%). Factors significantly associated with the incidence of HCC, as determined by Cox proportional hazards models, include higher age (hazard ratio, 4.36 [95% confidence interval, 1.33–14.29], p = 0.015), NA treatment (0.28 [0.13–0.62], p = 0.002), basal core promoter (BCP) mutations (12.74 [1.74–93.11], p = 0.012), high HBV core-related antigen (HBcrAg) (2.77 [1.07–7.17], p = 0.036), and high gamma glutamyl transpeptidase levels (2.76 [1.49–5.12], p = 0.001).

Conclusions: NA therapy reduced the risk of HCC compared with untreated controls. Higher serum levels of HBcrAg and BCP mutations are associated with progression to HCC, independent of NA therapy

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Introduction

An estimated 350 million individuals worldwide are chronically infected with hepatitis B virus (HBV), of whom 1 million die

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E-mail address: hosp3@omh.ogaki.gifu.jp (T. Kumada).

Abbreviations: HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HBV, hepatitis B virus; NA, nucleos(t)ide analogue; HBcrAg, HBV core-related antigen; BCP, basal core promoter; gamma-GTP, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase.

annually from HBV-related liver disease [1]. Chronic HBV infection is recognized as a major risk factor for the development of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) [1,2]. Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)-positive patients have a 70-fold increased risk of developing HCC compared to HBsAg seronegative counterparts [3,4]. HBV infection is endemic in Southeast Asia, China, Taiwan, Korea, and sub-Saharan Africa, where up to 85–95% of patients with HCC are HBsAg positive [5]. HCC is the third and fifth leading cause of cancer death in men and women, respectively, and the number of deaths and the mortality rate from HCC have greatly increased in Japan since 1975 [6]. Hepatitis C virus (HCV)-related HCC accounts for 75% of all HCCs in Japan and HBV-related HCC accounts for 15% [6].

In 2004, Liaw *et al.* reported a significant reduction in HCC in 651 adults receiving lamivudine after adjustment for baseline variables (hazard ratio, 0.49 [95% confidence interval (95% CI), 0.25–0.99], p = 0.047) [7]. However, the results were not significant after exclusion of 5 patients who developed HCC within 1 year of randomization (0.47 [0.22–1.00], p = 0.052). Therefore, in 2009, the National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Conference concluded that there was insufficient evidence to assess whether nucleos(t)ide analogue (NA) therapy can prevent the development of HCC [8].

The long-term use of lamivudine has not been recommended because of tyrosine-methionine-aspartate-aspartate (YMDD) mutations, which have occasionally been associated with severe and even fatal flares of hepatitis [9,10]. Therefore, adefovir dipivoxil should be added immediately in patients with virological or biochemical breakthroughs or no response. Currently, there are 2 nucleoside agents (lamivudine, entecavir) and 1 nucleotide agent (adefovir dipivoxil) available for treatment of HBV infection in Japan. The agent with the higher genetic barrier to resistance, entecavir, is considered the initial drug of choice [11]. Recently, 3 studies on lamivudine suggested that long-term sustained viral suppression was associated with a reduced likelihood of developing HCC [12–14].

In this study, we sought to determine if NA therapy was associated with a reduction in the development of HCC. Since the validity of treatment effects in observational studies may be limited by selection bias and confounding factors, we performed a propensity analysis [15].



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^{*} Corresponding author. Address: Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Ogaki Municipal Hospital, 4-86, Minaminokawa-cho, Ogaki, Gifu 503-8052, Japan. Tel.: +81 584 81 3341; fax: +81 584 75 5715.

Materials and methods

Patient selection

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Ogaki Municipal Hospital in January 2011, and was in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent for the use of stored serum samples for the study was obtained from all patients.

Between 1998 and 2008, 1220 consecutive HBsAg-positive patients, who visited the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Ogaki Municipal Hospital, were prospectively enrolled in our HCC surveillance program. Of these, 785 patients met the following inclusion criteria: HBsAg positive for more than 6 months, no evidence of HCV co-infection, exclusion of other causes of chronic liver disease (alcohol consumption >80 g/day, hepatotoxic drugs, autoimmune hepatitis, primary biliary cirrhosis, hemochromatosis, or Wilson's disease), follow-up duration of greater than 3 years, no evidence of HCC for at least 1 year from the start of the follow-up period, receiving no interferon treatment, and receiving NA therapy for more than 1 year before the detection of HCC (Fig. 1). In patients on NA therapy, the date of NA therapy initiation was considered the starting point of the follow-up period.

Of these 785 patients, 148 received NA therapy (NA group) and 637 patients did not receive NA therapy (non-NA group) during the follow-up period. To reduce the confounding effects of covariates, we used propensity scores to match NA patients to unique non-NA patients. Six covariates including age, sex, HBV DNA concentration, hepatitis B e antigen (HBeAg), platelet count, and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) activity were taken into account at the start of followup. We computed the propensity score by using logistic regression with the independent variable including age (<40 years or >40 years), sex (female or male), HBV DNA concentration (≤5.0 log copies/ml or >5.0 log copies/ml), HBeAg (negative or positive), platelet count (>150 \times 10³/m³ or \leq 150 \times 10³/m³), and ALT activity (\$40 IU/ml or >40 IU/ml), as shown in previous reported cut-off values according to the indication for NA therapy [16–19]. This model yielded a c statistic of 0.85 (95% confidence interval [CI], 0.82-0.88), indicating very good ability of the propensity score model to predict treatment status. We sought to match each patient who received NA therapy to a patient who did not receive NA therapy, having a propensity by using greedy 5–1 digit matching [20]. Once this threshold was exceeded, a patient with NA therapy was excluded. This score ranged from 0.09198 to 0.98967 and, in effect, represented the probability that a patient would be receiving NA. We were able to match 117 patients with NA therapy to 117 unique patients without NA therapy. The follow-up period ended on 31 December, 2011 or the date when HCC occurrence was identified.

Surveillance and diagnosis

All patients were followed up at our hospital at least every 6 months. During each follow-up examination, platelet count, ALT, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase (gamma-GTP), total bilirubin, alkaline phosphatase (ALP), albumin, and alphafetoprotein (AFP) levels were measured. We used commercially available kits to test blood samples for HBsAg, HBeAg, and anti-HBe (Abbott Japan Co., Ltd., Tokyo,

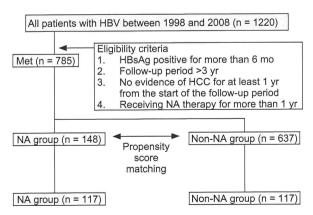


Fig. 1. Flowchart of the patient selection process.

Japan). Before November 2007, the serum HBV DNA concentration was monitored by a polymerase chain reaction assay (COBAS Amplicor HBV monitor test, Roche Diagnostics K. K., Tokyo, Japan) with a lower detection limit of approximately 2.6 log copies/ml, and after December 2007, it was monitored with another polymerase chain reaction assay (COBAS AmpliPrep-COBAS TaqMan HBV Test, Roche Diagnostics K. K.), with a lower detection limit of approximately 2.1 log copies/ml. HBV genotyping was performed as described previously [21]. Serum levels of HBV core-related antigen (HBcrAg) were measured using a chemiluminescence enzyme immunoassay (CLEIA) as described previously [22,23]. Precore nucleotide 1896 and basal core promoter (BCP) dinucleotide 1762/1764 were determined using the line probe assay (INNO-LiPA HBV PreCore assay; Innogenetics NV) [24,25]. The probes were designed to determine the nucleotides at position 1896 (G vs. A) in the precore region and positions 1762 (A vs. T) and 1764 (G vs. A and G vs. T) in the BCP region. A line probe assay was used to identify any emergence of YMDD mutations (INNO-LiPA HBV DR assay; Innogenetics NV).

Platelet count, ALT, gamma-GTP, total bilirubin, ALP, albumin, AFP, and HBV DNA values were expressed as average integration values [26,27] after the start of follow-up.

According to the Clinical Practice Guidelines for Hepatocellular Carcinoma in Japan [28], we performed ultrasound (US) and monitoring of 3 biomarkers (AFP, Lens culinaris agglutinin-reactive fraction of alpha-fetoprotein [AFP-L3], and desgamma-carboxy prothrombin [DCP]) every 3-4 months, and dynamic magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) every 12 months, for patients with cirrhosis under surveillance. For patients with cirrhosis under surveillance. For patients with chronic hepatitis, we performed US and monitoring of the 3 biomarkers every 6 months. Histological examinations were performed in 91 out of 234 patients. Among them, cirrhosis was diagnosed in 32 patients. In the remaining 143 patients, the diagnosis of cirrhosis was made according to typical US findings, e.g., superficial nodularity, a coarse parenchymal echo pattern, and signs of portal hypertension (splenomegaly >120 mm, dilated portal vein diameter >12 mm, patent collateral veins, or ascites) [29–31]. Patients who did not satisfy these criteria were classified as having chronic hepatitis. One hundred and forty-two patients were diagnosed with chronic hepatitis and 92 patients with cirrhosis. For diagnostic confirmation of HCC, patients underwent dynamic MRI. A histological diagnosis of HCC was made in 28 patients (surgical specimen, 23 patients; US-guided needle biopsy specimen, 5 patients). The remaining 29 patients were diagnosed with HCC based on typical dynamic MRI findings, including hypervascularity in the arterial phase with washout in the portal venous or delayed phase [32].

Treatments

In the NA group, 117 patients received NA therapy including 18 patients with lamivudine, 28 patients with lamivudine and adefovir dipivoxil, and 71 patients with entecavir. The indications for NA therapy followed the guidelines of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD), the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), or the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver (APASL) [33–35]. In contrast, of the 117 patients not on NA therapy, 104 did not receive treatment before NA was not yet approved in Japan and the remaining 13 patients declined NA therapy.

Statistical analysis

Continuous variables are expressed as medians (range). The Mann-Whitney U test was used for continuous variables, and the Chi-square test with Yates' correction or Fisher's exact test was used for categorical variables. Actuarial analysis of the cumulative incidence of hepatocarcinogenesis was performed using the Kaplan-Meier method, and differences were tested with the log-rank test. The Cox proportional hazards model and the forward selection method were used to estimate the relative risk of HCC associated with age ($\!\leqslant\!40$ years or >40 years), sex (female or male), treatment (NA or no NA), HBsAg (≤3.0 log IU/ml or >3.0 log IU/ml), HBV DNA level (≤5.0 log copies/ml or >5.0 log copies/ml), HBeAg (negative or positive), precore region (wild type or mutant), BCP (wild type or mutant type), HBcrAg (≤3.0 logU/ml or >3.0 logU/ml), platelet count (>150 \times $10^3/m^3$ or \leqslant 150 \times $10^3/m^3$), ALT (\leqslant 40 IU/ml or >40 IU/ml), total bilirubin, gamma-GTP, ALP, albumin, and AFP (<10 ng/ml or >10 ng/ml) for univariate and multivariate analyses. We used the minimum or maximum of the reference values at our institution as cut-off values for total bilirubin, gamma-GTP, ALP, and albumin. We conducted a sensitivity analysis to determine the magnitude of an unmeasured confounder [36].

We considered *p* values of 0.05 or less to be significant. Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS, version 18.0 for Windows (International Business Machines Corporation, Tokyo, Japan).

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Table 1. Baseline characteristics of all patients.

	NA group (n = 148)	Non-NA group (n = 637)	p value	Standardized difference in %	
Age (yr)	53 (26-81)	48 (4-85)	<0.0001	40.6	
Sex (female/male)	60/88	285/352		6.1	
Genotype (A/B/C/D/F/n.d.)	2/5/137/0/1/2	/5/137/0/1/2 24/60/389/2/0/162		37.6	
HBsAg (log ₁₀ IU/ml)	3.5 (-0.1-5.5)	3.3 (-1.3-7.9)	< 0.0001	53.8	
HBV DNA (log ₁₀ copies/ml)	7.0 (2.6-9.6)	3.8 (2.3-9.9)	< 0.0001	99.9	
HBeAg (±)	76/72	151/486	<0.0001	62.8	
Precore region (W/M/n.d.)	30/109/9	88/381/168	0.4652	0.0	
BCP (W/M/n.d.)	33/123/10	135/279/205	0.0074	27.3	
HBcrAg (log ₁₀ U/ml)	5.9 (2.9-7.0)	3.0 (2.9-7.0)	< 0.0001	96.7	
Platelet count (x10³/m³)	150 (32-388)	188 (37-503)	< 0.0001	-59.7	
ALT (IU/ml)	65 (7-1088)	26 (5-3410)	< 0.0001	44.1	
AFP (ng/ml)	3.9 (0.8-3363)	2.9 (0.8-3686)	0.0062	-6.2	
Cirrhosis (presence/absence)	62/86	91/546	< 0.0001	59.1	
Child-Pugh classification (A/B)	132/16	618/19	0.0002	32.7	
Follow-up duration (yr)	12.8 (3.1-19.6)	13.7 (3.1-20.0)	0.1565	-16.9	
Administration period (yr)	6.5 (1.5-11.0)		- 3		
Propensity score	0.58093 (0.09198-0.98686)	0.95253 (0.12913-0.98967)	< 0.0001	-132.3	

NA, nucleos(t)ide analogue; n.d., not done; HBsAg, hepatitis B surface antigen; HBV, hepatitis B virus; HBeAg, hepatitis B e antigen; W, wild type; M, mutant type; BCP, basal core promoter; HBcrAg, hepatitis B core-related antigen; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AFP, alpha-fetoprotein; Child-Pugh classification, reference no [50], Standardized difference in%; $100(X_{NA} - X_{non-NA})/([S_{NA}^2 + S_{non-NA}^2]/2)^{1/2}$, where for each covariate X_{NA} and X_{non-NA} are the sample means in NA and non-NA groups, respectively, and S_{NA}^2 and S_{non-NA}^2 are the corresponding sample variances.

Results

Patient characteristics

Table 1 shows baseline characteristics of all 785 patients before propensity matching. There were significant differences in age, HBV genotype, HBsAg, HBV DNA concentration, presence of HBeAg, BCP mutations, HBcrAg, platelet counts, ALT level, AFP level, presence of cirrhosis, and Child-Pugh classification. The baseline characteristics of the 234 study patients after propensity matching are summarized in Table 2. There are no significant differences in age, sex, HBV genotype, HBsAg, HBV DNA concentration, presence of HBeAg, precore region mutations, BCP mutations, platelet counts, ALT concentration, Child-Pugh classification, and follow-up duration. HBcrAg concentration was significantly higher in the NA group than in the non-NA group. NA was administered a median of 6.1 years (range: 1.5–10.7 years).

Factors associated with the incidence of hepatocarcinogenesis

Factors associated with the incidence of HCC as determined by the Cox proportional hazard models and the forward selection method were analyzed in all 785 patients. High age (hazard ratio, 6.43 [95% CI, 2.71–15.26], p <0.001), male sex (3.43 [1.67–7.02], p = 0.002), NA treatment (0.28 [0.21–0.85], p = 0.017), BCP mutation (19.96 [2.27–141.90], p = 0.03), high HBcrAg levels (8.21 [3.40–19.85], p <0.001), and high AFP levels (2.49 [1.43–4.34], p = 0.001) were significantly associated with the incidence of HCC.

HCC developed in 57 of 234 patients (24.4%) during follow-up after propensity matching. The 5-year, 7-year, and 10-year cumulative incidences of HCC were 9.6%, 20.4%, and 33.4%, respectively. The 5-year, 7-year, and 10-year cumulative incidences of

HCC were 2.7%, 3.3%, and 3.3%, respectively, in patients on NA therapy (n = 117) and 11.3%, 26.0%, and 40.0% in patients not on NA therapy (n = 117). Hepatocarcinogenesis occurred at significantly higher rates in the non-NA group (p = 0.0094, Fig. 2). The 5-year, 7-year, and 10-year cumulative incidences of HCC were 0.0%, 0.0%, and 0.0%, respectively, in patients with wild type BCP (n = 38) and 11.0%, 25.2%, and 41.9% in patients with mutant BCP (n = 112; p = 0.0006, Fig. 3). Factors associated with the incidence of HCC as determined by the Cox proportional hazard models and the forward selection method are listed in Table 3. Higher age (hazard ratio, 4.36 [95% CI, 1.33-14.29], p = 0.015), NA treatment (0.28 [0.13-0.62], p = 0.002), BCP mutation (12.74 [1.74-93.11], p = 0.012), high HBcrAg levels (2.77 [1.07-7.17], p = 0.036), and high gamma-GTP levels (2.76 [1.49–5.12], p = 0.001) were significantly associated with the incidence of HCC. In addition, 2 patients died due to hepatic failure during the follow-up period in the non-NA group.

The sensitivity analysis found that the observed relationship between NA treatment and HCC incidence could be diminished by the unmeasured confounder that the high prevalence of the unmeasured confounder is greater in the non-NA group than in the NA group. For example, suppose a binary unmeasured confounder that increased the hazard of HCC incidence (hazard ratio, 1.50) was present in 40% of those who were treated with NA and 80% of those who were not treated with NA. Then, the study's result would become less extreme and would no longer be statistically significant (hazard ratio under sensitivity analysis, 0.48 [95% CI, 0.22–1.05]).

Follow-up data of various parameters in patients on or not on NA therapy

For this analysis, we used the average integration value during the follow-up period (Table 4). ALT, gamma-GTP, ALP, AFP, and

Table 2. Baseline characteristics of patients on NA therapy and propensity-matched controls.

	NA group (n = 117)	Non-NA group (n = 117)	p value	Standardized difference in %
Age (yr)	52 (27-77)	52 (21-77)	0.9223	1.7
Sex (female/male)	44/73	45/72	0.8929	6.1
Genotype (A/B/C/n.d.)	1/4/109/3	4/7/85/21	0.1232	26.8
HBsAg (log ₁₀ IU/ml)	3.6 (0.9-5.5)	3.6 (0.9-7.9)	0.1440	29.9
HBV DNA (log ₁₀ copies/ml)	6.7 (2.6-9.6)	6.5 (2.3-9.6)	0.1273	20.5
HBeAg (±)	57/60	58/59	0.8960	2.0
Precore region (W/M/n.d.)	22/87/8	16/75/26	0.6399	5.1
BCP (W/M/n.d.)	22/88/7	17/70/30	0.9359	0.0
HBcrAg (log ₁₀ U/ml)	5.9 (2.9-7.0)	4.9 (2.9-7.0)	0.0022	41.2
Platelet count (x103/m3)	143 (32-262)	146 (37-396)	0.6340	-12.1
ALT (IU/ml)	68 (7-1088)	55 (9-3410)	0.0977	1.9
AFP (ng/ml)	2.8 (0.8-402)	3.9 (0.8-1010)	0.3118	-13.5
Cirrhosis (presence/absence)	48/69	44/73	0.6882	6.1
Child-Pugh classification (A/B)	108/9	104/13	0.5024	3.1
Follow-up duration (yr)	12.3 (3.1-19.4)	11.6 (3.1-18.3)	0.7346	-4.5
Administration period (yr)	6.1 (1.5-10.7)	, -	H	
Propensity score	0.65895 (0.11449-0.96977)	0.65895 (0.12913-0.96989)	0.9931	0.0

NA, nucleos(t)ide analogue; n.d., not done; HBsAg, hepatitis B surface antigen; HBV, hepatitis B virus; HBeAg, hepatitis B e antigen; W, wild type; M, mutant type; BCP, basal core promoter; HBcrAg, hepatitis B core-related antigen; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AFP, alpha-fetoprotein; Child-Pugh classification, reference no [50], Standardized difference in%; $100(X_{NA} - X_{non-NA})/([S_{NA}^2 + S_{non-NA}^2]/2)^{1/2}$, where for each covariate X_{NA} and X_{non-NA} are the sample means in NA and non-NA groups, respectively, and S_{NA}^2 and S_{non-NA}^2 are the corresponding sample variances.

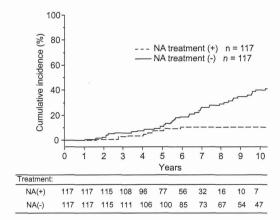
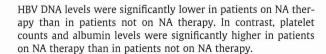


Fig. 2. Incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) according to nucleos(t)ide analogue (NA) treatment status. The NA group had a significantly higher rate of progression to HCC than the non-NA group (p = 0.0094).



Discussion

Our study shows that long-term NA maintenance therapy is associated with the suppression of progression to HCC. Liaw *et al.* reported that lamivudine decreased the risk of HCC in cirrhotic patients [7]. However, it is unclear whether the observed

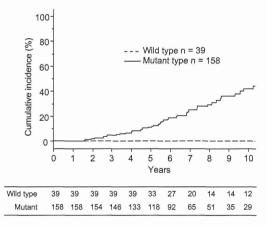


Fig. 3. Incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) according to basal core promoter (BCP) mutations. Patients with mutant-type BCP had a significantly higher rate of progression to HCC than those with wild type BCP (p = 0.0006).

decreased risk of HCC with NA therapy was due to the short observation period in their study. It is very difficult to prove the preventive effect of NA on the development of HCC, because randomized control studies are not ethically possible. In this study, patients on NA therapy were compared to propensity score-matched untreated controls. In these control patients, NA therapy had not yet been approved or was not routinely used for chronic hepatitis B at the time, or was declined by the patient. As opposed to the entire population, these propensity-matched patients were well matched to patients on NA; significant differences included higher HBcrAg levels in the NA group.

Large community-based studies have confirmed that advanced age, male sex, HBeAg positivity, low platelet count,

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Table 3. Factors associated with progression to hepatocellular carcinoma among propensity-matched patients (Cox proportional hazard model).

		Adjusted hazard ratio (95% CI)	p value
Age (yr)	≤40	1	0.015
	>40	4.36 (1.33-14.29)	
Treatment	no NA	1	0.002
	NA	0.28 (0.13-0.62)	
BCP	wild-type	1	0.012
	mutant-type	12.74 (1.74-93.11)	
HBcrAg (log ₁₀ U/ml)	≤3.0	1	0.036
	>3.0	2.77 (1.07-7.17)	
γ-GTP (IU/L)	≤56	1	0.001
	>56	2.76 (1.49-5.12)	

NA, nucleos(t)ide analogue; BCP, basal core promoter; HBcrAg, hepatitis B corerelated antigen; γ -GTP, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase.

higher ALT levels, elevated AFP levels, and presence of cirrhosis are factors associated with the development of cirrhosis and HCC [17,18]. Platelet count is a useful surrogate marker for the diagnosis of cirrhosis [37]. All subjects were not histologically diagnosed in this study. Therefore, we selected platelet count as a marker of hepatic fibrosis instead of cirrhosis. An elevated ALT level indicates the presence of active disease, and persistently elevated AFP levels are a reflection of an enhanced regenerative state in the liver [16]. In the REVEAL study, a high HBV DNA load was associated with an increased rate of HCC development [17]. A direct correlation was observed between baseline HBV DNA levels and the incidence of HCC, independent of serum ALT concentration. In a model that integrated baseline and follow-up HBV DNA levels, the cumulative incidence of HCC ranged from 1.3% in patients with undetectable levels of HBV DNA to 14.9% in patients with HBV DNA levels greater than or equal to 106 copies/ml. Therefore, we have selected factors, such as age, sex, HBeAg serostatus, HBV DNA concentration, platelet count, and ALT for propensity matching.

Although the exact mechanisms of hepatocarcinogenesis by HBV remain unclear, two mechanisms have been proposed [38,39]. One mechanism involves chronic necroinflammation of hepatocytes, cellular injury, and hepatocyte regeneration [40]. The other mechanism involves the direct carcinogenicity of HBV through chromosomal integration [41]. Complete and sus-

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tained viral suppression by NA might block both pathways and prevent the development of HCC. It is well known that the rate of HCC is significantly higher in patients with virological breakthrough or no response. In our study, when virological or biochemical breakthrough was observed and the YMDD mutation was detected in patients on lamivudine, adefovir dipivoxil was immediately added. In patients with cirrhosis, especially in the decompensated stage, sustained viral response on NA therapy was not necessarily associated with a preventative effect against the development of HCC, even though the incidence was lower than in a group not on NA [14]. It is not surprising that viral suppression decreased but did not eliminate the risk of HCC, because HBV DNA may have already integrated into the host genome before the initiation of therapy and may have resulted in genomic alternations, chromosomal instability, or both [42,43].

It is reported that patients with HBV genotype C infection have higher HBV DNA levels, higher frequency of pre-S deletions, higher prevalence of BCP T1762/A1764 mutations, and significantly higher chances of developing HCC [16,44–46]. In our study, T1762/A1764 mutations were observed in 158 (80.2%) out of 197 patients and were associated with a higher risk of developing HCC (adjusted hazard ratio, 12.740 [95% CI 1.743–93.108]), independent of NA therapy. However, the BCP T1762/A1764 mutations were detected in HCC patients from Asia and Africa, where HBV genotype C infection is predominant [16].

HBcrAg is a new HBV marker that reflects HBV load and corresponds to HBV DNA levels [21]. HBcrAg is comprised of HBV core antigen (HBcAg) and HBeAg; both are products of the precore/core gene and share the first 149 amino acids of HBcAg. The HBcrAg assay measures HBcAg and HBeAg simultaneously by using monoclonal antibodies that recognize both denatured HBcAg and HBeAg [47]. Serum HBcrAg concentration is well correlated with intrahepatic levels of covalently closed circular DNA (cccDNA) [48]. It is reported that HBcrAg is a useful marker for guiding cessation of NA therapy and evaluation of disease activity [21,49]. In our study, elevated serum HBcrAg concentration was associated with a higher risk of developing HCC (adjusted hazard ratio, 2.767 [95% CI 1.067–7.172]). This is the first report demonstrating a relationship between HBcrAg and HCC.

The present study has several limitations. The retrospective design might have introduced an unintended bias. The propensity matching method was adopted to reduce the confounding effects of covariates. Characteristics of patients who did or did not receive NA therapy were similar except for HBcrAg concentration.

Table 4. Average integration values of various parameters in patients who did or did not receive NA therapy.

	NA group (n = 117)	Non-NA group $(n = 117)$	p value
Platelet count (x103/m3)	17.0 (3.3-37.2)	14.8 (3.3-296)	0.0060
ALT (IU/ml)	28.2 (8.5-88.9)	39.1 (12.2-737.5)	< 0.0001
γ-GTP (IU/L)	27.0 (10.9-267.6)	36.2 (9.5-269.7)	0.0427
Total bilirubin (mg/dl)	0.7 (0.3-2.0)	0.7 (0.3-2.6)	0.1554
ALP (IU/L)	242.7 (113.5-1028.8)	265.2 (140.5-1247.6)	0.0127
Albumin (g/dl)	4.4 (3.0-5.0)	4.0 (2.4-4.8)	< 0.0001
Alpha-fetoprotein (ng/ml)	2.2 (0.8-106.0)	4.5 (0.9-723.8)	< 0.0001
HBV DNA (log ₁₀ copies/ml)	2.5 (2.1-8.9)	4.6 (2.1-9.3)	< 0.0001

NA, nucleos(t)ide analogue; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; γ-GTP, gamma glutamyl transpeptidase; ALP, alkaline phosphatase; HBV, hepatitis B virus.

However, the non-NA group included many historical cases when NA therapy was not yet available. In addition, the HBV DNA assay used between 1998 and 2007 was not the most sensitive one.

In conclusion, NA therapy reduces the risk of HCC compared with untreated controls. Higher serum HBcrAg levels and BCP mutations are associated with development of HCC, independent of NA therapy.

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Conflict of interest

The authors who have taken part in this study declared that they do not have anything to disclose regarding funding or conflict of interest with respect to this manuscript.

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<短 報>

岡山県における肝炎ウイルス検診陽性者の医療機関受診等に関する追跡調査

仁科 物治¹ 栗原 淳子² 則安 俊昭² 糸島 達也³ 山本 和秀⁴ 田中 純子⁵ 日野 啓輔^{1)*}

緒言:平成14年から18年までの5年間に老人保健 法に基づく保健事業として40歳から70歳までの受診 対象者に対して5歳刻みで節目検診が行われ、また節 目検診の対象者とならないが肝炎ウイルス感染の可能 性が高い者(過去に肝機能異常を指摘されたことのあ る者, 広範な外科的処置を受けたことのある者又は妊 娠・分娩時に多量に出血したことのある者であって定 期的に肝機能検査を受けていない者、基本健康診査の 結果、ALT (GPT) 値により要指導とされた者) に対 して節目外検診が行われた. これらの検診により新た な肝炎ウイルス感染者が見いだされたが、その後の医 療機関受診状況や肝炎に対する治療状況については、 岡山県が平成17年度に市町村の協力の下で調査を行っ て以来, 実態が把握されていないのが現状であった. 田中らは「広島県における検診結果」として広島県12 市町において聞き取り調査を行い、平成21年度報告書 に報告している5. それによると, HBV キャリアにおい ては,回答率を考慮した医療機関受診率48%,把握さ れている HBV キャリア 709 名中 440 名から回答があっ た(回答率 62.1%). また、HCV キャリアにおいては、 回答率を考慮した医療機関受診率65%,把握されてい る HCV キャリア 630 名中 439 名から回答があった(回 答率 69.7%). また、医療機関受診率に関しては、HBV キャリアにおいては「現在受診中」が62%,「以前受診 した」が15%、「受診していない」が23%であり、HCV キャリアにおいては「現在受診中」が80%,「以前受診 した」が13%、「受診していない」が7%にすぎなかっ た.

- 1) 川崎医科大学肝胆膵内科学
- 2) 岡山県保健福祉部健康推進課
- 3) 岡山県医師会 (岡山済生会総合病院)
- 4) 岡山大学大学院医歯薬学総合研究科消化器・肝臓内 科学
- 5) 広岛大学大学院医荫薬保健学研究院疫学·疾病制御学 *Corresponding author: khino@med.kawasaki-m.ac.jp \$利益相反申告: 山本 和秀, 日野 啓輔⇄MSD(株) <受付日2012年9月18日><採択日2012年11月16日>

そこで、厚生労働科学研究費補助金肝炎等克服緊急対策研究事業「肝炎ウイルス感染状況・長期経過と予後調査及び治療導入に関する研究」の一環として、岡山県における平成14年度から18年度までの節目・節目外検診で新たに見いだされた肝炎ウイルス感染者について、その後の医療機関受診状況や肝炎に対する治療状況を把握する目的でアンケートによる追跡調査を行ったので報告する.

対象と方法:対象は岡山県において平成14年度から18年度までの検診(節目・節目外)で肝炎ウイルス感染が判明した2,566人(B型974人,C型1,592人)のうち,調査可能であった24市町村において既に追跡調査等が行われていた肝炎ウイルス感染者を除いた1,352人(52.7%)(B型549人,C型803人)であった.調査用紙は各市町村より直接肝炎ウイルス陽性者へ郵送され、また一部の市町村(笠岡市58人,勝央町11人)においては保健師が直接聞き取り調査を行った.回答後の調査用紙は肝炎ウイルス陽性者から匿名の形で本研究の事務局である川崎医科大学肝胆膵内科学研究室へ直接郵送された.

アンケートは以下の項目について調査を行った. 1. 在住市町村. 2. 陽性と通知されたのは B 型肝炎ウイルス (HBV) か C 型肝炎ウイルス (HCV) か. 3. 性別と年齢. 4. 「肝炎ウイルス感染の可能性が高い」と通知を受けて医療機関を受診したか否か. 5. 受診していない場合その理由. 6-1. 受診した場合は受診先がかかりつけ医か専門医療機関か. 6-2. 受診先での診断名. 7. 現在も通院を継続しているか否か. 8. 通院を中止した場合はその理由. 9. 治療を受けている場合は主な内容.

結果:調査を行った1,352人のうち716人(53%)より回答が得られた.このうち11人は既にウイルス性慢性肝炎として医療機関に通院していながら検診を受けており、8人は調査用紙の返送はあったものの無回答であり、1人は肝炎ウイルス陰性という回答であったため.

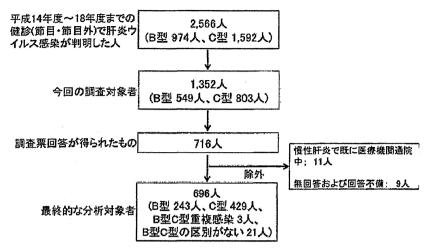


Fig. 1 今回の調査対象および分析対象者

この20人を除外した696人を分析対象とした. 肝炎ウイルス別ではB型が243人, C型が429人, B型とC型の重複感染が3人, B型, C型の区別がないのが21人であった. 平均年齢と性別(男/女)はB型が666歳(77/166), C型が72.1歳(142/287)であった. この検診は老人保健法に基づく健康診査の一環であることから, 一般的な肝炎ウイルスキャリアにくらべて年齢層が高い集団であると考えられた.

医療機関受診率はアンケートに対する回答があった 中で解析すると 85% (211+397/716) であったが、調 査表の回答者ではなく、調査表送付者に対する割合で 算出したところ, B型が38.4%(211/549), C型が49.4% (397/803)であった、したがって調査表の回答がなかっ た肝炎ウイルス陽性者はすべて受診していないと見な した数値である. 「検診結果通知後受診しなかった」と いう回答者についてその理由を見てみると,「必要がな いと思った|「肝機能に異常がない」「高齢である」「自 覚症状がない」などの回答があった. 受診したと答え たものの中の医療機関の受診先については、 かかりつ け医の占める割合がB型で118人/211人(56%), C 型で162人/397人(41%)であった. 受診時の診断名 はB型では211人中、肝機能異常なし、あるいは軽度 異常程度が82.5%,慢性肝炎が11.4%,肝硬変・肝細胞 癌が0.6%、残りの5.5% は不明であったのに対し、C 型では397人中、肝機能異常なし、あるいは軽度異常 程度が 56.9%, 慢性肝炎が 26.2%, 肝硬変・肝細胞癌が 5.5%, 残りの11.4% は不明であり, C型はB型にくら

べて比較的進行した肝疾患を診断される割合が高かった。

医療機関受診者のその後の通院継続の有無については、B型が53.1% (129/211)、C型が73.4% (314/397)の割合で通院を継続していた。通院を継続している場合の受療内容は、B型129人中の12.4%が核酸アナログ製剤の投与を受けており、C型314人中の23.3%がインターフェロン治療を受けていた。

通院を中止した理由では、「担当医から通院しなくてよいと言われた」というのが最も多く、B型の通院中断者82人のうち71.8%、C型の通院中断者83人のうち57%を占めた.

考察:今回岡山県で平成14年度から18年度にかけて行われた肝炎ウイルス検診の陽性者に対する追跡調査を行ったが、B型陽性者とC型陽性者では多少病態が異なるため、医療機関での診断名の割合が異なっていた、無症候性キャリアの割合が高いB型では肝機能異常なし、あるいは軽度異常程度が82.5%を占めており、またこの影響なのか医療機関通院継続率もC型に比べて低かった。田中らは「広島県における検診結果」として広島県12市町において聞き取り調査を行い、平成21年度報告書に報告している¹¹. HBV キャリアにおいては、回答率を考慮した医療機関受診率48%、把握されているHBVキャリア709名中440名から回答があった(回答率62.1%)。また、HCVキャリアにおいては、回答率を考慮した医療機関受診率65%、把握されてい

る HCV キャリア 630 名中 439 名から回答があった(回 答率 69.7%). それによると医療機関受診率に関しては、 HBV キャリアにおいては「現在受診中」が62%、「以 前受診した」が15%,「受診していない」が23%であっ た. 一方 HCV キャリアにおいては「現在受診中」が80% と高く、「以前受診した」が13%、「受診していない」は 7% にすぎなかった. B型陽性者の通院中断の理由とし て、担当医から「通院しなくてもよい」と言われた割 合が71.8%認めた点も今後の課題と考えられる. した がって、抗ウイルス療法が適切に行われていない可能 性もあり、ウイルス肝炎治療のガイドラインに準じた 治療の啓発をさらに推進する必要があると考えられた. 現在, B型肝炎ウイルス感染者の肝発癌危険因子はウイ ルス量 (HBV-DNA) であることが明らかにされている ので2,トランスアミナーゼの値でフォローを中断する ようなことは慎むべきであり、こうした点は肝臓専門 医以外の医師にもっと広く啓発していく必要があると 考えられる.

わが国の肝癌患者は高齢化が進んでおり、岡山県も例外ではない。今回の調査においてもアンケート回答者の平均年齢は高齢であった。肝炎ウイルス陽性の高齢者は肝癌の高危険群であり³³⁻⁵¹, 医療機関での経過観察あるいは治療が極めて重要である。これを実現するためには全県的な肝炎ウイルス陽性者の把握とともに地域に密接した保健活動を行政も含めてさらに推進していく必要がある。

結論:岡山県において平成14年度から18年度に実施された肝炎ウイルス検診(節目・節目外検診)で見出された陽性者について、その後の医療機関受診状況や受療状況を把握する目的で追跡調査を行った。肝炎ウイルス検診陽性者に対する医療機関への受診勧告や通院継続率の引き上げなどが今後の更なる課題と考えられた。

索引用語:ウイルス性肝炎、健康診断、追跡調査

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英文要旨

A follow-up survey of hepatitis virus carriers after notification of their infection in Okayama prefecture

Sohji Nishina¹⁾, Junko Kurihara²⁾, Toshiaki Noriyasu²⁾, Tatsuya Itoshima³⁾, Kazuhide Yamamoto⁴⁾, Junko Tanaka⁵⁾, Keisuke Hino¹⁾*

In Okayama prefecture we investigated by questionnaires whether hepatitis B virus (HBV) (n = 549) or hepatitis C virus (HCV) carriers (n = 803) consulted a doctor after they had been informed of their infection at their initial checkup for viral hepatitis between 2002 and 2006. The ratio of patients who consulted a doctor after notification of infection was 38.4% (211/549) of HBV carriers and 49.4% (397/803) of HCV carriers, respectively. Among those patients, 53.1% of HBV carriers and 73.4% of HCV carriers were on follow care at the start of this investigation. These results indicated a need to establish a more effective follow up system for hepatitis virus carriers following notification at the initial medical checkup.

Key words: virus hepatitis, medical checkup, follow-up survey

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- Department of Hepatology and Pancreatology, Kawasaki Medical School
- Public Health Policy Division, Department of Health and Social Welfare, Okayama Prefectural Government
- Okayama Prefectural Medical Association (Okayama Saiseikai General Hospital)
- 4) Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences
- 5) Department of Epidemiology, Infectious Disease Control and Prevention, Hiroshima University, Institute of Biomedical and Health Sciences
- *Corresponding author: khino@med.kawasaki-m.ac.jp

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ウイルス肝炎と肝癌の撲滅を目指した実地診療のすすめかた

C型肝炎はどのように日本で蔓延し肝癌を もたらしたのかー 肝癌抑制の実地診療のすすめかた一

田中純子

広島大学 大学院医歯薬保健学研究院 疫学・疾病制御学/たなか・じゅんこ

はじめに

ウイルス性肝炎の病因ウイルスの一つである C型肝炎ウイルス(HCV)は1989年になって HCV遺伝子の一部がクローニングされた、肝 炎ウイルスの中では新しいウイルスである。そ の後、世界中で急速にその測定系の開発と普及 が推進された。

World Health Organization (WHO) は、HCV 関連抗体検査が輸血用血液のスクリーニングとして広く導入されはじめる 1992 年以前には、世界中の輸血後肝炎の主な原因は HCV であり、特にアメリカにおける輸血後肝炎の 90% は HCV によるものであったことを報告¹⁾している. 1990 年代に入ると、肝炎ウイルスの検査や調査などが広く行われ、徐々に社会における C型肝炎ウイルスの感染状況が明らかとなってきた.

C型肝炎ウイルスは、HCV に感染しているヒトの血液に感受性のある個体が曝露することにより感染が起こる。HCV に感染すると、約30%は一過性の感染で治癒するが、約70%が持続感染状態(キャリア化)になるといわれている。したがって、特定の集団の中で、感染リスクの高い行為が繰り返されるとその集団におけるHCV キャリアの累積が起こり、HCV キャリア率がきわめて高くなる可能性があると考えられる。

世界全体では HCV キャリア率は平均約 2%, 毎年 300~400 万人が新規に HCV に感染し.

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HCV に持続感染している人は約1.5億人と試算²⁾され、年間35万人以上がHCV 関連の疾患で死亡していると推定されている。

本稿では、わが国におけるC型肝炎ウイルスによる感染状況を示すとともに、輸血後肝炎発生率、HCV新規感染率、HCVキャリア数の状況、対策について述べてみたい。

肝癌死亡とその成因―日本と世界の 状況―

わが国における死因は、1981年以降ほぼ30年にわたり悪性新生物が第1位を占めている. 最新(2011年)の人口動態統計資料によると総死亡数1,253,066人のうち、1位:悪性新生物357,305人(28.5%)、2位:心疾患194,926人(15.6%)、3位:肺炎124,749人(10.0%)、4位脳血管疾患123,867人(9.9%)となり、脳血管疾患と肺炎の順位が入れ替わった。

悪性新生物による死亡を部位別にみると, 「肝」(肝および肝内胆管)の悪性新生物による 死亡は,前年に比べやや減少し3.2万人(男性 20,972人,女性10,903人)であったが,依然と して部位別にみた同死亡数の上位から4番目 (肺7.0万人,胃5.0万人,大腸4.5万人)に位 置している.

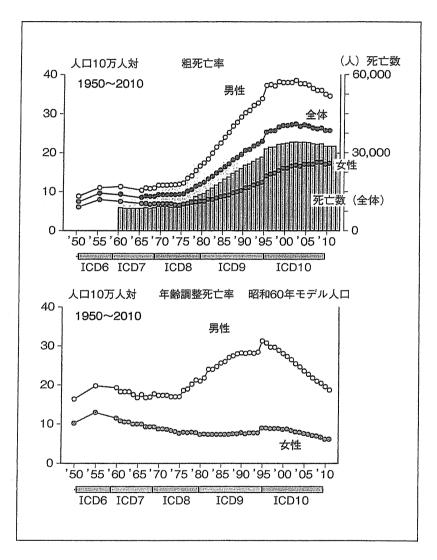
わが国の肝癌による死亡の年次推移を図1に示す. 1950年代はじめから1970年代半ばまでは人口10万人あたり10人前後(死亡実数は1万人以下)であった死亡数は、その後増加し、2002年に人口10万対27.5のピークを示した後.

0910-1551/13/ ¥100/頁/JCOPY

■ 1992 年以前には、世界中の輸血後肝炎の主な原因は HCV であり、特にアメリカにおける 輸血後肝炎の 90% は HCV によるものであった。

- 世界全体では HCV キャリア率は平均約 2%,毎年 $300\sim400$ 万人が新規に HCV に感染し,HCV に持続感染している人は約 1.5 億人.
- わが国の肝癌による死亡数:男性の肝癌死亡は女性の約2倍の高値を示すが,2002年以後, 男性では減少傾向が,女性では依然として微増状態.
- 肝癌死亡の年齢調整死亡率は、男女とも減少傾向.

図 1 わが国における肝癌による 死亡の推移



若干の減少あるいは横ばい状態を保っている. 男性の肝癌死亡は女性の約2倍の高値を示すが,2002年以後,男性では減少傾向が,女性では依然として微増状態にある.一方,1985年モデル人口を基準集団とした年齢調整死亡率の年次推移をみると,1995年にICD10への移

行に伴う段差増があるものの、男女とも減少傾向が認められる。他の癌と同様に治療の進歩に伴う延命効果や肝癌リスク集団の減少などが考えられる。

なお,国立がん研究センターの資料(がん対 策情報センター癌情報サービス)によると,

- B型肝炎ウイルス(HBV)の持続感染に起因する肝癌の死亡割合は 1980 年代から現在に 至るまで 10 万人対 3~4 人と増減なくほぼ一定の値を示している.
- 現在でも肝癌死亡の約7割がHCVの持続感染に起因している.
- 1998 年以降、非 B 非 C 型に由来する肝癌による死亡の割合が肝癌の 10~15% を占める.

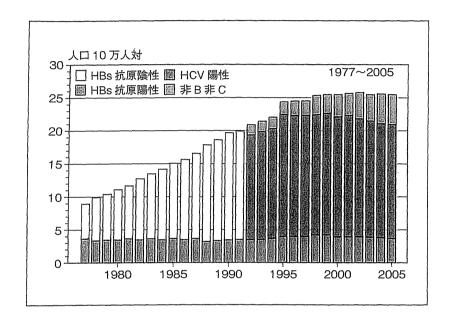


図 2 成因別にみた肝細胞癌死亡 の推移—推計値—

(厚生労働省大臣官房統計情報部:人口動態統計全国原発性肝癌追跡調査報告より推計)

2005年の肝癌罹患者数は男性では 28,729人, 女性では 13,465人, 計約 4.2万人と, 肝癌実死亡数よりもやや多い値を示している. 男性は女性の 2 倍多い肝癌罹患(発生)がみられ, この傾向は世界においても同様である³⁾.

次に、病因ウイルス別にみた肝癌死亡の推移について、2年に一度の大規模調査を行ってきた日本肝癌研究会の調査成績(1982~2009)と人口動態統計資料を用いて推定したものを示す(図2).

B型肝炎ウイルス(HBV)の持続感染に起因する肝癌の死亡割合は1980年代から現在に至るまで10万人対3~4人と増減なくほぼ一定の値を示している。一方、1970年代から2000年代にかけて肝癌による死亡が増加した原因は非A非B型によるものと考えられるが、HCV

感染の診断が可能となった 1992 年以降、そのほとんどが HCV の持続感染によるものであることがみてとれる。すなわち、現在でも肝癌死亡の約7割が HCV の持続感染に起因していることがわかる。また、1998 年以降、非B非C型に由来する肝癌による死亡の割合が肝癌の 10~15% を占め徐々に増加傾向にあり、その原因については non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH)との関連も示唆されている^{4,5)}.

肝癌死亡の地理的分布

肝癌(肝および肝内胆管の悪性新生物)による 死亡の地理的分布状況および経年推移の把握を 目的として,厚生労働省疫学研究班では,指定 統計調査票の使用の承認を得て,肝癌標準化死 亡比 Standard Mortality Ratio (SMR, Bayes 推

- 2001~2005年では、西日本地域を中心に標準化死亡比の高い地域が認められており、 特に中国・四国・九州地域の肝癌死亡が高い傾向がある。
- わが国では地域と時期により異なった肝癌死亡の変遷が観察される.
- 1975 年代以後、肝癌死亡の増加がみられたのは HCV の持続感染に起因する肝癌が 増加したことが原因であると推測できる.

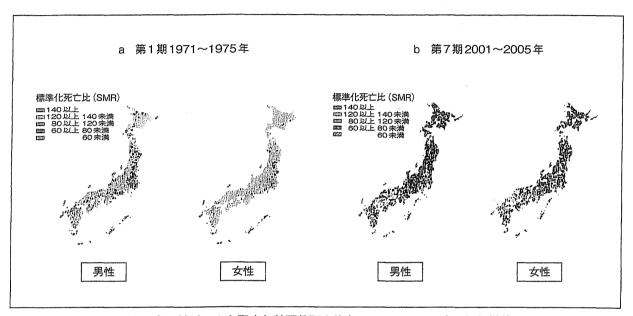


図3 市町村別にみた肝癌年齢調整死亡比(Bayesian method)の経年推移

定量による)を1971年から2005年までの7期別に算出している。図3に,第1期1971~1975年,第7期2001~2005年について男女別に示す。

肝癌標準化死亡比は全国平均を100として市町村別にその高低を示しているが、1971~1975年(第1期)では肝癌死亡の顕著な地域差は認められない。この時期は、図1および図2を参考にすると、肝癌死亡は人口10万人あたり10程度と低く、その成因はHBVの持続感染に起因するものが約4割と多くを占めていることがわかる。一方、2001~2005年(第7期)では、西日本地域を中心に標準化死亡比の高い地域が認められており、特に中国・四国・九州地域の肝癌死亡が高い傾向がある。この時期の

肝癌死亡は人口 10万人あたり 27程度と高く, HBV の持続感染に起因するものが約 1.5 割す なわち HCV の持続感染に起因するものが約 7 割と多いことがわかる.

このようにわが国では地域と時期により異なった肝癌死亡の変遷が観察され、1975年代以後、肝癌死亡の増加がみられたのは HCV の持続感染に起因する肝癌が増加したことが原因であると推測することができる.

一般集団における C 型肝炎ウイルス 感染状況

一般集団におけるC型肝炎ウイルスの感染状況を把握するため、2000年以後に得られた二

- 40歳以下の年齢集団の HCV キャリア率は初回供血者集団を元に、40歳以上の年齢集団の HCV キャリア率は節目検診受診者集団の資料を元に算出。
- HCV キャリア率は、8地域ともに高年齢層において高い値を示す、

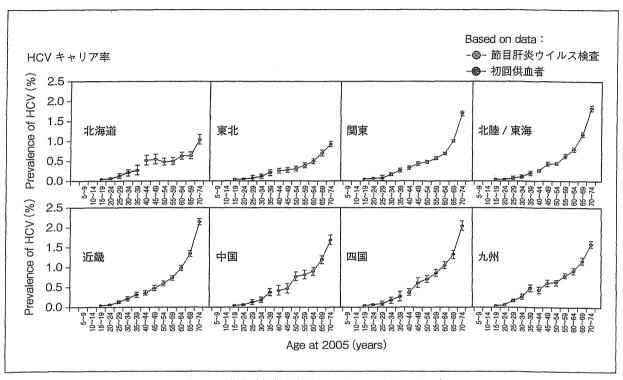


図 4 8 地域別年齢階級別にみた HCV キャリア率 (文献 6) より引用)

つの大規模集団の特性を考慮して算出・推計した8地域別5歳刻みの年齢階級別にみた肝炎ウイルスキャリア率(HCV キャリア率)を示す⁶⁾ (図4).

二つの大規模集団とは、日本赤十字血液センターにおける 2001 年から 2006 年の 6 年間の初回供血者 3,748,422 人、もう一つは、2002 年から 5ヵ年計画で実施された肝炎ウイルス検診の節目検診受診者のうち、HCV 検診受診者 6,304,276 人である.

日本赤十字血液センターの献血時のスクリー

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ニング検査は、輸血用血液の安全性確保のために行われるものであり、全国一律の基準、同一の試薬を用いて精度を維持し判定されている。また、節目・節目外検診は、老人保健法の住民検診に組み込まれた形で、公的補助により肝炎ウイルス検査(C型肝炎ウイルス検査、B型肝炎ウイルス検査)が行われたものであり、全国統一の検査手順に従って判定されたものである。図4に示した40歳以下の年齢集団のHCVキャリア率は初回供血者集団の資料を元に、また、40歳以上の年齢集団のHCVキャリア率は、

- 1992 年以前には、HCV 感染の主な感染経路は輸血によるものであった.
- 現在では輪血に伴う HCV 感染はほぼ駆逐されたといえる状況。
- 地域によって HCV の新規感染率の多寡には相違がある可能性が示唆される.

節目検診受診者集団の資料を元に算出している.

HCV キャリア率は、8 地域ともに高年齢層において高い値を示すが、特に、肝発癌年齢と考えられる 60 歳以上の高年齢集団では関東以西の地域、すなわち近畿、中国、四国の地域では約 2% と、北海道や東北地域の 1% 程度と比較して特に高い値を示しており、前項で示した肝癌死亡の高い地域と合致していることがわかる.

輸血後肝炎発生率の推移について

HCV 感染の経路は、HCV に感染している血液や血液製剤、臓器の提供を受けること、HCV に汚染された注射筒や針を用いて点滴など処置をされること、静注の覚醒剤を用いることなどであると WHO により指摘されている。冒頭に記述したように、HCV 抗体検査が輸血用血液のスクリーニングとして導入・普及しはじめる 1992 年以前には、HCV 感染の主な感染経路は輸血によるものであったことが容易に推察される。

わが国の輸血後肝炎発症率の推移を示す (図5). 1960年代半ばまで、全受血者の50% 以上に発生していた輸血後肝炎は売血から献血制度に切り替えが完了した1968年には16.2% までに減少し、その後各種スクリーニング検査の導入により1990年までには全血の2~3%にみられるにすぎない状態にまで改善されている。さらに、世界に先がけて導入されたHCV 抗体測定系(第一世代)に続き、1992年には感度、特異度ともにすぐれた第二世代のHCV 抗

体測定系が導入され,1999年にはNATが開始されたことにより,現在では輸血に伴うHCV感染はほぼ駆逐されたといえる状況となっている.この40数年の間に,HCVの主な感染経路であった輸血による感染は急激に減少・ほぼ消滅したといえる.

HCV の新規感染率について

HCV の新規発生の有無に関する前向き調査を行った成績を(表1)に示す。

広島県赤十字血液センターにおける1994年 から 2004 年までの供血者 418.269 人(総献血本 数1,409,465本)を対象として、期間内に複数 回献血をした218,797人のうち、新たなHCV 感染が確認されたのは16例であり、新規発生 率は10万人年あたり1.86人(95% CI:1.06~ 3.01人) 7 であった. この成績は. 1992年から 3年間の観察期間で行った同様の調査⁸⁾ (1.8/10 万人年, 95% CI: 0.4~5.2 人)とほぼ同等の値 であった. 性別にみると統計学的な有意差は認 められていないが、女性(2.77人/10万人年)は 男性(1.08 人/10 万人年)よりやや高い値を示し ていた. 大阪の供血者集団を対象とした1990 年代前半の調査では、広島の同集団と比較して やや高い値を示しており、地域によって HCV の新規感染率の多寡には相違がある可能性が示 唆されている.

一方、観血的処置を頻回に受ける血液透析患者を対象とした多施設前向き調査を行った成績⁹⁾では、3ヵ月以上の観察が可能であった

- 現在のわが国の一般集団においては HCV 感染の新規発生はごくまれ、
- 血液を介する感染の可能性がある集団などにおける新規発生のリスクは 10² 倍程度高い.

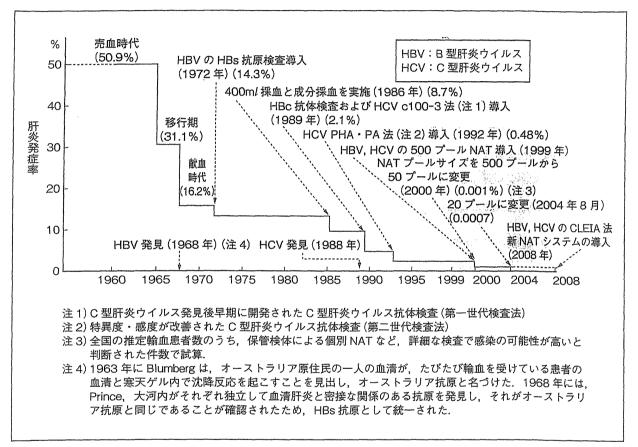


図5 日本における輸血後肝炎発症率の推移

(「日本赤十字社輸血後肝炎の防止に関する特定研究班」研究報告書(1993.4~1996.3) 一部改変を基に厚生労働省作成)

2,114 人中 HCV キャリアの新規発生数は 16 例 であり、HCV 新規感染率は 3.3 人/1,000 人年 (95% CI: 1.7~4.9 人)であった.

これらの成績は、現在のわが国の一般集団に おいては HCV 感染の新規発生はごくまれであ る一方、血液を介する感染の可能性がある集団 などにおける新規発生のリスクは 10² 倍程度高 いことが示されていることから、引き続き

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HCV 感染防止対策は重要であるといえる

HCV キャリア数の把握

HCV 持続感染者(HCV キャリア)がどのくらいの規模で社会に存在するのかについて人数規模や地域年齢偏在を把握することは、社会に対して疾病が与える規模(burden)を測るうえでも、また、対策を講じるうえでも重要である。

- 検診などで陽性と判定されても、医療機関を受診する割合が低いことが現時点の問題点。
- 「感染を知らないまま潜在している HCV キャリア」に対して積極的に肝炎ウイルス検査を 推進することが重要であるが、検査後「陽性」と判定された場合、肝臓専門医による診断と 医療機関への継続受診が重要.
- マルコフの過程モデルによる推定では、治療介入を行わない場合、男性では 50 歳、 女性では 60 歳を過ぎるころから肝発癌率が上昇する.

	対象者	新規感染例	観察人年	新規感染率(95% CI)	
●供血者【広島】			·		
1992~1995	114,266	3	168,726	1.8/10 万人年	
				(0.4~5.2/10 万人年)	
1994~2004	218,797	16	861,842	1.9/10 万人年	
				(1.1~3.0/10 万人年)	
●供血者【大阪】					
1992~1997	448,020	59	1,095,668	5.4/10 万人年	
	※抗体陽転			(4.1~7.0/10 万人年)	
●定期健康診断受診者【広島】					
1992~1995	3,079	3	5,786	0/10 万人年	
				(0~0.6/10万人年)	
●障害者·老人福祉施設入所者【静岡】					
1988~1992	678	0	2,712	0/10 万人年	
				(0~1.3/10万人年)	
●血液透析施設【広島】					
1999~2003	2,114	16	4,893	3.3/1,000 人年	
				(1.7~4.9/1,000 人年)	

表 1 HCV 感染の新規発生率(1988~2004)

しかし、肝炎ウイルスに感染している人のほとんどは自覚症状がない、肝臓の状態が進行しても自覚症状が現れにくい、という特性を持っているため、なかなか肝病態別の数を把握することはむずかしい.

既述した二つの大規模集団から得られた年齢階級別肝炎ウイルスキャリア率を用いて、肝炎ウイルスキャリア数の推計を行ったところ、2005年時点の全年齢層において、HCVキャリア数は807,903人(95% CI:68.0~97.4万人)と算出⁶⁾される.この値は、初回供血者集団および肝炎ウイルス検診受診者集団におけるキャリア率からの推計値であることから、自身が「感染を知らないまま潜在しているキャリア」の

推計数に相当している.

「感染を知らないまま潜在しているキャリア」に対しては、積極的に肝炎ウイルス検査を推進することが重要であると同時に、検査後に陽性と判定された場合の医療機関受診へのシェーマを構築することも大事である。検診などで陽性と判定されても、医療機関を受診する割合が低いことが現時点の問題点として指摘¹⁰されている。

献血を契機に偶然に発見された HCV キャリアのうち医療機関へ受診した 1,019 例(平均年齢45.3歳)の初診時の肝病態の内訳¹¹⁾をみると,肝病態が慢性肝炎以降に進展していたのは肝癌症例も含み 54% と半数を超えていたこと,また,治療介入を行わない場合には、マルコフ過