#### 第2章 C型肝炎の治療

Grazoprevir 100 mg の群であっても RVR は 91%の症例が達成されていた。IL28B のタイプでは 明らかな効果の違いは認められなかったが、Genotype 1a 型では SVR 率が 81  $\sim$  90%とやや低いの に対し、Genotype 1b 型では SVR 率が 92  $\sim$  100%と高かった。耐性は少数に A156T、D168A/E/K が出現した  $^{16}$ 。

副作用に関しては、すべての grazoprevir 群で 9 %、コントロール群は 7 %であった。Grazoprevir は高用量になると高ビリルビン血症、肝障害を認める場合があった。

### 〈5〉アスナプレビル (Asunaprevir, BMS-650032: ブリストルマイヤーズ)

1 型高ウイルス量において、アスナプレビル 600 mg 1 日 2 回十 Peg-IFN/RBV 併用と、Peg-IFN/RBV のみを比較して、SVR は各々 83%と 46%と報告された。ただしアスナプレビル 600 mg、1 日 2 回は肝障害が起こりやすいことから、より小用量での使用が必要と考えられた。一方、アスナプレビルとダクラタスビルの 2 剤に加えて Peg-IFN/RBV を併用する 4 剤併用療法(QUAD study)が考案され、前回 Peg-IFN/RBV 治療における partial/null responder、すなわち難治例を対象とした症例群における治療効果の検討がなされた 「5.18」。ダクラタスビル 60 mg に、アスナプレビル 200 mg を 1 日 2 回 (Dual A1)、あるいは 1 回 (Dual A2)、Dual A1 に Peg-IFN/RBV を追加 (Quad B1)、あるいは Dual A2 に Peg-IFN/RBV を追加 (Quad B2) し、計 24 週間の治療期間で、SVR12 はそれぞれ 78%(A1)、65%(A2)、95%(B1)、95%(B2)となり、4 剤併用は良好な成績であった(図5 ) 「1)。1b 型では経口製剤のみでも概して良好な成績であったが、特に 1a 型においては経口製剤のみでは効果が低く、Peg-IFN/RBV を追加することにより良好な成績となった。頭痛、下痢、倦怠感などが比較的多い副作用であった。一方、Grade3/4 の副作用として肝障害を認めたが頻度は低かった。現在第 II 相まで進行中である。

## 2 NS5A 阻害薬

### 〈1〉ダクラタスビル(Daclatasvir, BMS-790052: ブリストルマイヤーズ)

Genotype 1 型の C 型慢性肝炎初回治療症例においてダクラタスビル 3, 10, 60 mg あるいはプラセボと Peg-IFN/RBV との併用 48 週間投与のプロトコールにて、各々 eRVR (extended RVR; 4 週と 12 週ともにウイルス検出しない率) は 42, 83, 75, 8%であった。

Genotype 1 と 4 型においてダクラタスビル 20 mg あるいは 60 mg と Peg-IFN/RBV 24 週あるいは 48 週の併用では、ダクラタスビル群の eRVR は 54%であり、Peg-IFN/RBV 群では 13%であった。前述したように、アスナプレビル+ダクラタスビル+ Peg-IFN/RBV の QUAD study において含まれる薬剤であり、前回 Peg-IFN/RBV 無効症例に対して大きな効果が期待されている <sup>15. 18)</sup>。

## 3 NS5B 阻害薬

### (1) Sofosbuvir (GS-7977: Gilead)

顕著な抗ウイルス活性を示し、Genotype 1型のC型慢性肝炎の臨床第 I 相における検討で sofos-

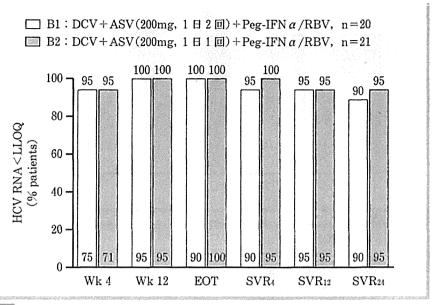


図5 DCV/ASV と Peg-IFN/RBV 併用療法による4種併用療法の治療効果 前回の Peg-IFN/RBV でウイルスの消失を認めなかった難治な NVR 症例を対象にしている が、4種併用により、高い SVR を達成している。

DCV: ダクラスタスビル、ASV: アスナブレビル、Peg-IFN/RBV: ペグインターフェロン / リバビリン、NVR: non virological response、SVR: sustained virological response

(文献 17 より一部改変)

buvir 400 mg を投与すると、1回の単独投与のみで3日後には3.9 Logのウイルス減少を認めた。顕著かつ幅広い抗ウイルス活性を有すること、前述したように genetic barrier が高いことから、多くの臨床試験、すなわち ATOMIC、PROTON、ELECTRON等の第日相試験、NEUTRINO、FISSON、POSITRON、FUSION等の第日相試験が行われた。これらの臨床試験において sofosbuvir に RBV、あるいは Peg-IFN/RBV が併用されている場合には S282T 耐性変異は出現せず、唯一変異が出現した症例は Genotype 2b 型症例で sofosbuvir 単独で治療が行われた症例であり、 genetic barrier の高いことが確認された。

Genotype 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 の症例において, sofosbuvir 400 mg 12 週間と Peg-IFN/RBV との併用により (最大 36 週間の RGT) すべての群で 87%を超える SVR であった (第 II 相)。 Genotype 1型の非肝硬変の初回治療症例において、Peg-IFN/RBV との併用で 91%の SVR となり、ウイルス学的 breakthrough は生じず、また IL28B も治療効果に明らかな影響を認めなかった。

Genotype 2 型と 3 型の初回治療症例に関しては、sofosbuvir と RBV あるいはさらに IFN を併用した群において、IFN 併用の有無にかかわらず SVR24 は 100%であり、IFN による治療の上乗せ効果は Genotype 2 型と 3 型には認めなかった。一方、sofosbuvir 単独では SVR は 60%であった。 臨床第Ⅱ相の NEUTRINO study では、Genotype 1、4、5、6 型の計 327 症例において sofosbuvir

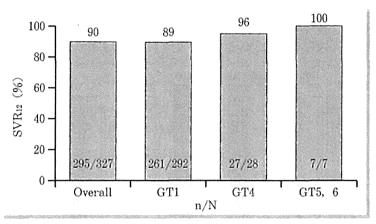


図 6 Sofosbuvir と Peg-IFN/RBV 併用療法の各 Genotype に対する治療 効果(NEUTRINO)

各種 Genotype 初回治療症例に対する計 12 週の Peg-IFN/RBV 併用の治療成績。Sofosbuvir は 400 mg を 2 回 / 日投与。ちなみに Genotype 2, 3 型ではインターフェロンによる治療の改善は認めない。

Peg-IFN/RBV: ペグインターフェロン / リバビリン

(文献 19より一部改変)

400 mg と Peg-IFN/RBV の併用が、また Genotype 2,3 型に対しても臨床第  $\blacksquare$  相の FISSON study が行われ、sofosbuvir 400 mg と RBV の併用 12 週間あるいは Peg-IFN/RBV の併用 24 週間が比較された。NEUTRINO study における SVR12 は Genotype 1, 4, 5, 6 全体で 90%であり、また、Genotype 1 型全体で 87%、1a 型で 92%、1b 型で 82%であった。4 型は 96%、5 型と 6 型の症例 は計 7 人と少なかったが、全例 SVR12 を達成した(図 6  $)^{19}$ 。IL28B、あるいは肝硬変の影響は低いものの、SVR は、これらの因子が悪い場合、やや低下した。FISSON study では、Genotype 2、3 型において、sofosbuvir 400 mg と RBV の併用のみと、Peg-IFN/RBV の併用は効果に違いはなく、IFN による効果の上積みはやはり認められなかった。副作用は全般に軽度であり、中断症例は  $1\sim2$ %であった。頭痛、嘔気、不眠などが最も多かった  $^{19}$ 。

## M

## 投与方法の実際と工夫

C型肝炎の治療はDAAsの開発により大きく進歩した。DAAの標的はC型肝炎ウイルス(hepatitis C virus; HCV) NS3/4 プロテアーゼ、ポリメラーゼのほか、NS5A 蛋白であるが、このうち、プロテアーゼ 阻害薬の開発が最も早く、わが国では HCV Genotype 1 型に対してテラプレビル (TVR)、シメプレビル (SMV)、バニプレビル (VPR)が Peg-IFN および RBV との併用で認可されている。Genotype 2 型に対しては、TVR が Peg-IFN と RBV との併用で 2014 年 9 月に適応追加された。プロテアーゼ阻害薬の単独使用では治療効果が悪いのみならず、高率に耐性変異を誘発

することが明らかになっている™ため、当初は既存治療の Peg-IFN と RBV との併用で治療効果を 高める試みがなされてきたためである。

IFN ベースの治療は、DAA の宿命でもある薬剤耐性の問題を、ある程度補完するが、ISDR(Interferon sensitivity determining region) <sup>213</sup> /IRRDR (interferon/ribavirin resistance-determining region) <sup>21,233</sup>, コアアミノ酸変異<sup>240</sup> などのウイルス因子の影響を受けるほか、IL28B SNP (single nucleotide polymorphism) など宿主因子の影響を受ける。また、IFN 特有の甲状腺機能障害、鬱(うつ)、間質性肺炎などの副作用については考慮されなければならない。

## 1) Peg-IFN α 2b + RBV + テラプレビル

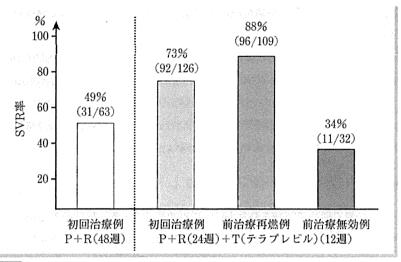
テラブレビル(TVR)は、世界で初めて開発された HCV に対する DAA で、線状型構造のいわゆる第一世代の HCV プロテアーゼ阻害薬である。わが国でも、欧米諸国とほぼ同時に使用可能となった。はじめは Genotype 1 型にのみ適応であったが、2014 年 9 月、Genotype 2 型にも適応追加された。使用方法は、Peg-IFN と RBV に加え 12 週間併用し、さらに Peg-IFN と RBV のみをさらに 12 週間,計 24 週間使用する。 TVR は 1 回 750 mgを 1 日 3 回食後に投与するが、1 錠は 250 mg であるため 9 錠(2,250 mg)使用する。しかし、RBV や TVR 投与量を調整することで副作用を軽減させることが臨床的に知られており、年齢・性別等により 1,500 mg(6 錠)に減量投与することが推奨されている(表 1 ) <sup>25)</sup>。 わが国では DAA と併用が認められている IFN は Peg-IFN α-2b のみである。治療成績は、国内臨床試験での SVR 率 73%であり、従来の Peg-IFN + RBV 48 週間の SVR 率約 50%を大きく上回るものであった。しかも、治療成績は前治療成績と関連し、前治療として Peg-IFN + RBV 療法でいったんはウイルスが陰性化した後に再燃したものの成績が最も良く、一度もウイルスが陰性化しなかった無効例では、治療成績が劣っていた(図 7 ) <sup>25)</sup>。また、前述のように IFN ベースの治療法はウイルス因子・宿主因子の影響を受けるため、ISDR/IRRDR とIL28B を用いると治療効果予測が可能となる <sup>25)</sup> (図 8 )。しかし副作用として貧血、血小板減少などの血球系のほか、Stevens-Johnson 症候群、中毒性表皮壊死融解症(toxic epidermal necrolysis;

### 表 1 PEG-IFNα2b + RBV + TVR併用療法のヘモグロビン値からみた開始時の両薬 剤の減量の目安

| 12.0 未満 3 剤併用療法の安全性は保たれていた |                |                       |  |  |  |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| 12.0 ~ 13.0 未満             | 200 mg 減量      | 減量 (1,500 mg)         |  |  |  |
| 13.0 ~ 14.0 未満             | 女性のみ 200 mg 減量 | 女性のみ減量 (1,500 mg)     |  |  |  |
| 14以上                       | 通常用量           | 2,250 mg または 1,500 mg |  |  |  |
| 開始時 Hb 値 (g/dL)            | リバビリン (RBV)    | テラプレビル (TVR)          |  |  |  |

RBV や TVR 投与量を調整することで副作用を軽減させることが臨床的に知られており、 年齢・性別等により 1,500 mg (6 錠) に減量投与することが推奨されている。

(筆者作成)

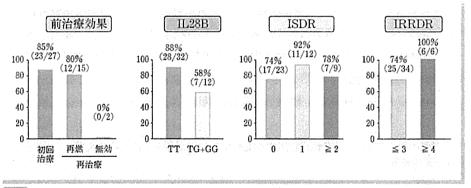


### 図7 Peg-IFN + RBV + TVR の治療成績(1)

治療成績は、国内臨床試験での SVR 率 73%であり、従来の Peg-IFN + RBV 48 週間の SVR 率約 50%を大きく上回るものであった。しかも、治療成績は前治療成績と関連し、前治療として Peg-IFN + RBV 療法で一度はウイルスが陰性化したが再燃したものの成績が最も良く、一度もウイルスが陰性化しなかった無効例では、治療成績が劣っていた。

P: Peg-IFN, R: RBV (リバビリン)、SVR: sustained virological response TVR: テラプレビル

(国内臨床開発試験成績より)



### 図8 Peg-IFN + RBV + TVR の治療成績(2)(山梨大学, n = 46)

Peg-IFN + RBV + TVR の治療効果は、前治療効果、宿主因子 (IL28B)、ウイルス因子 (ISDR, IRRDR) に関連する。

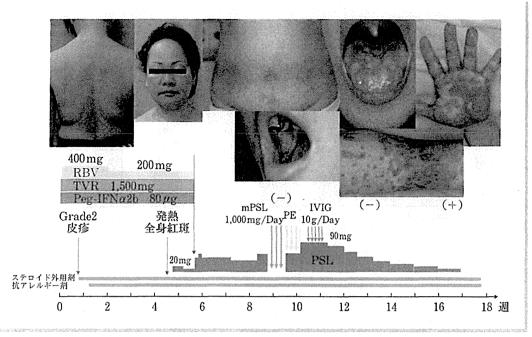
Peg-IFN: ペグインターフェロン

RBV: リバビリン TVR: テラプレビル

ISDR: interferon sensitivity determining region

IRRDR: interferon/ribavirin resistance-determining region

(山梨大学病院自験例より)



### 図9 テラプレビル (TVR) による中毒性表皮壊死融解症 (TEN)

Peg-IFN + RBV + TVR 治療中に TEN を発症した症例。mPSL, PE, IVIG などにより救命しえたがウイルスは再陽性化した。

TVR:テラプレビル、Peg-IFN:ペグインターフェロン、RBV:リバビリン、mPSL:メチルプレドニゾロンPE:血漿交換療法、IVIG:免疫グロブリン静注療法、PSL:プレドニゾロン、TEN:toxic epidermal necrolysis (山梨大学病院症例より)

TEN),薬剤過敏症症候群(drug induced hypersensitivity syndrome; DIHS) など重篤な皮膚合併症が知られており、「皮膚科専門医と連携して使用すること」との警告がなされ、現実的には肝臓専門医が常勤する施設で皮膚科医との連携でのみ使用が可能との制限が設けられている。

当院でも実際に TEN の症例を経験した(図9)<sup>28)</sup>。腎機能障害や高尿酸血症も市販後以降に問題となり慎重な使用が求められている。このほか第一世代のプロテアーゼ阻害薬としては boceprevir があるが、国内未発売である。

## 2) Peg-IFNα-2a または Peg-IFNα-2b + RBV + SMV

シメプレビル (SMV) は、大環状構造をとるいわゆる第二世代の NS3-4 プロテアーゼ阻害薬であり、第一世代に勝るとも劣らない治療効果を持つほか、安全な副作用プロファイルを有している。 すなわち TVR でみられた重篤な皮膚障害や貧血・腎機能障害はほとんどない。また、薬剤耐性プロファイルも第一世代とは異なっており、理論的には第一世代プロテアーゼ阻害薬に対する耐性変異を持つ HCV にも有効である (図 10)。

良好な安全性プロファイルから、わが国では TVR のような処方制限がないもののほか、併用で

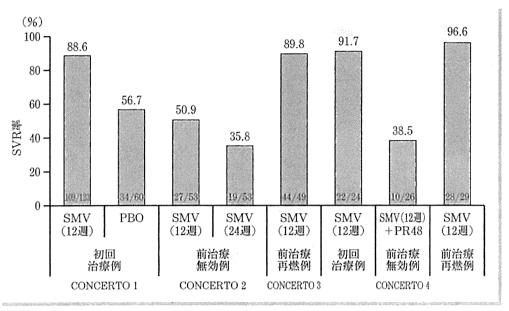


図 10 Peg-IFN + RBV + SMV の治療成績 (国内臨床試験)

シメプレビル (simeprevir; SMV) は、大環状構造をとるいわゆる第二世代の NS3-4 プロテアーゼ阻害薬であり、第一世代に勝るとも劣らない治療効果を持つ。

PBO:プラセボ、SMV:シメプレビル、PR:Peg-IFN/RBV

(国内臨床開発試験成績より)

きる IFN も Peg-IFN  $\alpha$ -2b のみならず Peg-IFN  $\alpha$ -2a も使用可能である。使用方法は、TVR と同様、Peg-IFN/RBV に加え 12 週間併用し、さらに Peg-IFN/RBV を 12 週間使用する。また、TVR とは異なり、治療歴や背景因子、初期の治療効果に応じて、Peg-IFN/RBV の 2 剤併用期間をさらに 24 週間、すなわち 3 剤併用期間の 12 週に加え計 48 週間治療することも可能である。SMV は 100 mg 錠 1 日 1 回投与であるため利便性も格段に高まっている。臨床試験の治療成績も優れており、TVR 同様、前治療効果と関連するが、IFN の種類によらず高い治療効果を示している(表 2  $)^{20,300}$ 。 2014 年 10 月現在、わが国ではアスナプレビル(ASV)とダクラタスビル(DCV)の経口剤による IFN フリーの治療法は、初回治療例にはまだ適応を取得していないため、Peg-IFN + RBV + SMV が第一選択として推奨されている  $^{310}$  (2 章 1 -1 、  $^{57}$  ~ 50 の表 1 ~ 3 )。

## 3) Peg-IFN α-2b + RBV +バニプレビル

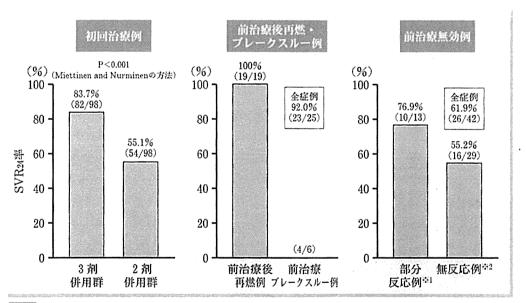
バニプレビル (VPR) は SMV 同様、第二世代のプロテアーゼ阻害薬に分類される薬剤であるが、 SMV とは薬剤耐性プロファイルが異なる (図 11)。 すなわち、 SMV は Q80R/K が耐性変異となるが、 VPR ではこの変異は問題にならない。 また、 臨床試験も前治療無効例では VPR の併用期間 が 24 週に設定されていることから、61.9%もの高い SVR が臨床試験から得られている 表 3  $^{3D}$ 。 このことから、前治療無効例では Peg-IFN  $\alpha$ -2b と RBV に VPR を 24 週併用することが認められた。

### 表2 プロテアーゼ阻害薬に対する HCV 耐性変異株の種類 (海外データ)

| 薬剤   | HCV 耐性<br>変異株 | V36A/<br>M | T54S/<br>A   | V55A   | Q80R/<br>K                              | R155K/<br>T/Q | A156S  | A156T/<br>V | D168A/<br>E/G/H/<br>T/Y | V170A/<br>T |
|--|---------------|------------|--|--|---|---------------|--|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 第一世代<br>/直鎖型   | テラプレ<br>ビル    |            |  |  | C C C B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B |               |  |             |                         |             |
| i mod hino minu alampid kudaka kalaun lah dibasakhin | バニプレ<br>ビル    |            | aligación en eje politicación anti-se equipalente en en en esta en el entre en el entre en el entre en el entr | E cogan (Labalato Promo - Andreas appairs rea  |   | 93.0 (US      | godini name i i pira nini naza u u nini na za premi na p |             |                         |             |
| 第二世代<br>/大環状型  |               |            | PAR NA makanakanak na kana ana ana ana ana ana a   | America Medicine per experimental quantitativa de la persona de la perso |   |               | (Material Material)  |             |                         |             |
|  | アスナブ<br>レビル   |            | Militaria e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e  | e engleton enem e egippologyani  |   |               |  |             |                         |             |

【対象・方法】臨床試験において認められたプロテアーゼ阻害薬に対する HCV 耐性変異を検討した。

(C. Sarrazin et al: J Hepatol S88-S100, 2012 より作図)



### 図 11 Vaniprevir 国内第Ⅲ相試験 まとめ (SVR₂ҳ率)

- \*<sup>1</sup>前治療で HCV RNA が一度も陰性化せず、治療期 12 週までに HCV RNA 量の減少が 2 Log IU/mL 以上の 症例
- \*\*<sup>2</sup> 前治療で HCV RNA が一度も陰性化せず、治療期 12 週までに HCV RNA 量の減少が 2 Log IU/mL 未満の 症例

ブレークスルー:ウイルス学的 breakthrough

(バニプレビル承認時評価資料より)

### 表3 Vaniprevir 国内第Ⅲ相試験 安全性 まとめ 副作用(臨床検査値の異常変動を含む)

### (1)副作用発現率

| 安全性解析対象症例數 | 288 例           |
|------------|-----------------|
| 副作用発現例数    | 287 <b>(</b> ₱) |
| 副作用発現率 (%) | 99.7%           |

### (2)副作用の内訳 (発現率 10%以上の副作用を抜粋)

| 副作用の種類            | 発現例數 | %    |
|-------------------|------|------|
| 血液およびリンパ系障害       | 84   | 29.2 |
| 貧血                | 63   | 21.9 |
| weps              | 43   | 14.9 |
| 胃腸障害              | 214  | 74.3 |
| 腹部不快感             | 47   | 16.3 |
| 上腹部痛              | 29   | 10.1 |
| 下痢                | 60   | 20.8 |
| 消化不良              | 29   | 10.1 |
|                   | 96   | 33.3 |
| 口内炎               | 55   | 19.1 |
| <b>嘔吐</b>         | 64   | 22.2 |
| 一般・全身障害および投与部位の状態 | 271  | 94.1 |
| 疲労                | 67   | 23.3 |
| 注射部位紅斑            | 31   | 10.8 |
| 注射部位反応            | 72   | 25.0 |
| 倦怠感               | 91   | 31.6 |
| 発熱                | 211  | 73.3 |
| 感染症および寄生虫症        | 54   | 18.8 |
| 臨床検査              | 218  | 75.7 |
| ヘモグロビン減少          | 95   | 33.0 |
| 好中球数減少            | 126  | 43.8 |
| 血小板数減少            | 88   | 30.6 |
| 体重減少              | 30   | 10.4 |
| 白血球数減少            | 114  | 39.6 |
| 代謝および栄養障害         | 96   | 33.3 |
| 食欲減退              | 82   | 28.5 |
| 筋骨格系および結合組織障害     | 112  | 38.9 |
| 関節痛               | 69   | 24.0 |
| 神経系障害             | 165  | 57.3 |
| 味覚異常              | 63   | 21.9 |
| 頭痛                | 127  | 44.1 |
| 精神障害              | 58   | 20.1 |
| 不眠症               | 41   | 14.2 |
| 呼吸器、胸郭および縦隔障害     | 56   | 19.4 |
| 皮膚および皮下組織障害       | 217  | 75.3 |
| 脱毛症               | 91   | 31.6 |
| そう痒症              | 90   | 31.3 |
| 発疹                | 90   | 31.3 |

副作用は1例につき1回のみカウントした。

MedDRA ver.16.0

24 週投与群のデータも含まれる。

(バニプレビル承認時評価資料より)

実際には 150 mg カプセルを 1 回 300 mg (2 カプセル), 1 H 2 回投与する。重篤な副作用はないが、 TVR や SMV に比較して悪心・嘔吐、下痢などの胃腸障害が若干多いとされている ( 表 3 )。

## IV

### IFN ベースの DAAs 併用療法の実際

C型肝炎治療に DAA が登場し、治療効果と安全性、利便性から今後は IFN フリーの治療が主体となると思われる。しかし 2014 年 10 月現在、DAA のみの治療法は、IFN 不適格未治療と、IFN 不耐容例に限られ、IFN 使用が可能な未治療例は IFN ベースの治療が第一選択である。しかも IFN を用いた治療法は DAA の宿命である耐性変異の問題を補完する可能性がある。すなわち ASV + DCV 治療では、NS3 プロテアーゼ阻害薬である ASV に対する D168V や NS5A 阻害薬である DCV の Y93H、あるいはこの両者があると、治療成功に期待が持てないが、耐性変異があっても IFN を併用することでウイルス排除を期待できる場合がある。また、耐性変異がある症例に DAA のみの治療を行うと他部位にも耐性変異を誘発する可能性があり、多剤耐性変異を獲得する可能性がある。たとえば第二世代プロテアーゼ阻害薬 ASV 耐性の D168V 変異は、現在 IFN と併用が認められている SMV にも耐性となるし、NS5A-Y93H 変異株への DCV 使用は L31M 耐性を獲得する可能性があるが。現在のところ NS3 耐性変異は薬剤の曝露がなくなると約1年で野生株への逆変異がみられることが知られているが、NS5A 耐性は少なくとも数カ月以上、場合によっては年余にわたり持続することが明らかになっているが。また、IFN そのものにも発癌抑制効果があるとの意見もあるが、一定の見解は得られておらず今後の課題である。

現在 IFN ベースの DAA 併用療法は、使用できる DAA がプロテアーゼ阻害薬のみであり、TVR、SMV、VPR の 3 種に限られる。このうち Genotype 2 に適応があるのは TVR だけである。また TVR は 1 錠あたりの薬剤含有量が少なく、用量調整が可能である。SMV は Peg-IFN  $\alpha$ -2b のみならず Peg-IFN  $\alpha$ -2a とも併用可能であるし、治療歴や背景因子、初期の治療効果に応じて、Peg-IFN と RBV の 2 剤併用期間をさらに 36 週間、計 48 週間治療することが可能である。VPR は前治療無効例に限り Peg-IFN/RBV と 24 週間併用することが可能であり、治療成績も良好である。このようにそれぞれの薬剤の使用法には特徴があり、これらを熟知して用いることが重要である。

(II, II:前川伸哉・榎本信幸, III, IV:坂本 穣・榎本信幸)

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### **Original Article**

# Liver stiffness measurement for risk assessment of hepatocellular carcinoma

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Aim: Liver fibrosis is a risk factor for hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), but at what fibrotic stage the risk for HCC is increased has been poorly investigated quantitatively. This study aimed to determine the appropriate cut-off value of liver stiffness for HCC concurrence by FibroScan, and its clinical significance in hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV) and non-B, non-C (NBNC) liver disease.

*Methods:* Subjects comprised 1002 cases (246 with HCC and 756 without HCC) with chronic liver disease (HBV, 104; HCV, 722; and NBNC, 176).

Results: Liver stiffness was significantly greater in all groups with HCC, and the determined cut-off value for HCC concurrence was more than 12.0 kPa in those with HCV, more than 8.5 kPa in those with HBV and more than 12.0 kPa in those with NBNC. Liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was an inde-

pendent risk factor for new HCC development in HCV. For HCV, risk factors for HCC concurrence were old age, male sex, low albumin, low platelets and liver stiffness, while for HBV they were old age, low platelets and liver stiffness, and for NBNC they were old age, elevated  $\alpha$ -fetoprotein and liver stiffness.

Conclusion: Liver stiffness cut-off values and their association with HCC concurrence were different depending on the etiology. In HCV, liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was an independent risk factor for new HCC development. Collectively, determining the fibrotic cut-off values for HCC concurrence would be important in evaluating HCC risks.

Key words: FibroScan, hepatocellular carcinoma, liver fibrosis

### **INTRODUCTION**

EPATOCELLULAR CARCINOMA (HCC) is the fifth most common cancer in the world and the third most common cause of cancer deaths. HCC, accounting for 90% of primary liver cancer, is a global clinical issue. For improvement in the prognosis of

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HCC, curative therapy following early detection is important. To this end, it is critical to identify high-risk groups for HCC and perform appropriate surveillance in the clinical practice of chronic liver disease. It has been postulated that hepatitis virus infection, old age, male sex, alanine aminotransferase (ALT) elevation, liver fibrosis, and low albumin (Alb), low platelets (Plt) and  $\alpha$ -fetoprotein (AFP) elevation are risk factors for HCC; however, liver fibrosis is the most important risk factor irrespective of its etiology.<sup>3-6</sup>

To date, liver fibrosis has been evaluated by liver biopsy, but it is associated with several problems such as invasiveness, sampling errors, semiquantitation and diagnostic differences among pathologists. With the development of FibroScan (Echosens, Paris, France) using transient elastography, it has become possible to quantitate liver elasticity non-invasively. The diagnostic accuracy of FibroScan for liver fibrosis has been recognized widely for various chronic liver diseases with the exception of some liver conditions such as congestion,

severe inflammation or cholestasis in which liver fibrosis might be overestimated with FibroScan.<sup>8–12</sup> The risk for HCC is evaluable based on liver stiffness measured by FibroScan in cases with hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV).<sup>12–19</sup> Nevertheless, in most reports the risk for HCC was only indirectly evaluated based on the value for liver cirrhosis as measured by FibroScan. Liver stiffness related to HCC has not been directly evaluated. Furthermore, the utility of FibroScan in evaluation of the risk for HCC has not been elucidated in non-B, non-C (NBNC) liver disease.

In this study, liver stiffness in patients with chronic liver disease was quantitatively measured and liver stiffness related to HCC occurrence was elucidated separately in cases with HCV, HBV and NBNC liver disease for investigations of its clinical utility.

### **METHODS**

### **Patients**

THE SUBJECTS COMPRISED 1002 patients with L chronic liver disease whose liver stiffness was measured by FibroScan consecutively at the University of Yamanashi Hospital between January 2010 and December 2012. Informed consent had been obtained for measurement of liver stiffness before the modality was approved by the national insurance in October 2011. The HCV group (722 cases including 66 sustained virological response [SVR] cases), HBV group (104 cases) and NBNC group (176 cases) were defined as HCV antibody positive, hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) positive, and HBsAg negative and HCV antibody negative cases, respectively. Both HBsAg and HCV antibody positive cases (n = 3) and HIV co-infection cases (co-infection with HBV, n = 1) were excluded. HCC cases included those with a history of HCC. Among the 1002 cases with chronic liver disease, 246 had HCC and 756 were without HCC. Of those without HCC, 470 hepatitis C cases were followed up by abdominal ultrasonography, contrast computed tomography (CT) or ethoxybenzyl (EOB) contrast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) every 3-6 months. HCC was diagnosed by contrast ultrasonography, contrast enhancement in the arterial phase and poor enhancement at the equilibrium phase in contrast CT (including CT arteriography and computed tomographic arterial portography) and contrast MRI, and histology by liver tumor biopsy. According to the Declaration of Helsinki, this study was performed after approval was obtained by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Yamanashi.

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### Measurement of liver stiffness

FibroScan502 (Echosens) was used for measurement with the M-probe and L-probe. Patients were placed in a supine position with the right hand at the most abducted position for right intercostal scanning. When at least 10 effective measurements were obtained with effective measurement at 60% or higher and interquartile range at less than 30%, such measurements were defined as effective and the median was employed as the result of the measurement.<sup>20</sup>

### **Analytical methods**

In each group of liver diseases (HCV, HBV and NBNC), liver stiffness was compared between patients with and without HCC. Then, the cut-off value of liver stiffness for diagnosis of HCC was determined for later analysis in each group. Patients' backgrounds, laboratory data and liver stiffness in the HCV, HBV and NBNC groups were subjected to univariate, multivariate and subgroup analyses on the relationship with HCC. The 470 HCV patients without HCC at enrollment were followed up with the day of measurement of liver stiffness designated as day 0. Factors related to the development of HCC were examined by univariate and multivariate analyses using values for liver stiffness and blood test results at enrollment.

### Statistical analysis

Category data were analyzed by the  $\chi^2$ -test and Fisher's exact test, while numerical data were examined by Mann–Whitney *U*-test. The cut-off value was set to yield the largest Youden index by receiver–operator curve (ROC) analysis. Multiple logistic analysis was performed for multivariate analysis on factors related to HCC concurrence. The Cox regression hazard model was employed for multivariate analysis of factors related to HCC development. Yearly development of HCC was expressed as per person•year. Cumulative incidence of HCC development was calculated by the Kaplan–Meier curve. *P*-values less than 0.05 were considered significant.

### **RESULTS**

### **Baseline characteristics**

CINICAL BACKGROUND FACTORS of 1002 patients were compared between patients with and without HCC according to group (Table 1). There were 722 cases in the HCV group, 104 in the HBV group and 176 in the NBNC group. For all groups there was a significant association with older age, low Alb and Plt,

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Table 1 Baseline characteristics of patients with and without HCC

| Factors                     | HCV pat             | ients $(n = 722)$   |        | HBV pa             | tients $(n = 104)$ | NBNC patients ( $n = 176$ ) |                   |                     |        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|
|                             | HCC(+)<br>(n = 167) | HCC(-)<br>(n = 555) | P      | HCC(+)<br>(n = 29) | HCC(-)<br>(n = 75) | P                           | HCC(+) $(n = 50)$ | HCC(-)<br>(n = 126) | P      |
| Age (years)                 | 72 (42–89)          | 61 (20-89)          | < 0.01 | 62 (49–76)         | 52 (19-73)         | < 0.01                      | 70 (53-88)        | 63 (19-88)          | <0.01  |
| Sex (male/female)           | 111/56              | 288/266             | < 0.01 | 23/6               | 47/28              | 0.11                        | 33/17             | 69/58               | 0.16   |
| Alb (g/dL)                  | 3.6 (1.8-5.1)       | 4.3 (2.1-5.3)       | < 0.01 | 4.4 (2.0-5.0)      | 4.5 (3.5-5.2)      | 0.04                        | 3.8 (1.9-4.7)     | 4.1 (2.4-5.5)       | < 0.01 |
| T-Bil (mg/dL)               | 0.8 (0.3-4.7)       | 0.7 (0.2-26.9)      | < 0.01 | 0.7 (0.3-1.2)      | 0.7 (0.2-1.6)      | 0.45                        | 0.7 (0.1-1.5)     | 0.7 (0.1-2.3)       | 0.90   |
| AST (U/L)                   | 48 (13-340)         | 32 (8-262)          | < 0.01 | 28 (16-95)         | 25 (14-178)        | 0.06                        | 43 (17-146)       | 32 (10-291)         | 0.03   |
| ALT (U/L)                   | 43 (4-557)          | 32 (2-334)          | < 0.01 | 25 (10-134)        | 21 (9-375)         | 0.13                        | 29 (10-80)        | 29 (6-517)          | 0.99   |
| γ-GT (U/L)                  | 36 (11-918)         | 28 (9-354)          | < 0.01 | 56 (13-267)        | 21 (8-222)         | < 0.01                      | 74 (15-628)       | 55 (7-743)          | 0.14   |
| Plt (10 <sup>9</sup> /L)    | 94 (25-299)         | 157 (40-343)        | < 0.01 | 118 (21-207)       | 172.5 (58-300)     | < 0.01                      | 117 (14-264)      | 168 (30-387)        | < 0.01 |
| AFP (ng/mL)                 | 12.9 (1.3-54 923)   | 3.6 (0.8-839)       | < 0.01 | 3.8 (1.3-22 421)   | 2.7 (1.1-70.9)     | < 0.01                      | 5.8 (1.3-5194)    | 3.2 (0.8-25.3)      | < 0.01 |
| Stiffness (kPa)             | 21.3 (3.9-75.0)     | 7.8 (3.0–72.0)      | < 0.01 | 9.2 (4.7-75.0)     | 5.6 (2.8-32.4)     | < 0.01                      | 15.6 (3.3-75.0)   | 7.4 (2.8-66.4)      | < 0.01 |
| Hx of IFN Tx (yes/no)       | 38/129              | 153/402             | 0.21   | _                  | _                  | _                           | _                 | _                   | _      |
| SVR/non-SVR                 | 10/34               | 56/97               | 0.09   | _                  | _                  | -                           | _                 | _                   | _      |
| Tx of NA                    | ·<br>               | _                   | _      | 16/13              | 34/41              | 0.37                        |                   | -                   | _      |
| HBV-DNA >4 log<br>copies/mL | -                   | -                   | -      | 4/25               | 16/59              | 0.38                        | _                 | -                   | -      |

Values are expressed as the mean (range).

<sup>-,</sup> Not applicable; AFP, α-fetoprotein; Alb, albumin; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; HBV patients, HBs antigen positive patients; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HCV patients, HCV antibody positive patients; Hx, history; IFN, interferon; NA, nucleoside analog; NBNC patients, HBs antigen negative and HCV antibody negative patients; Plt, platelet count; stiffness, liver stiffness; SVR, sustained virological response; T-Bil, total bilirubin; Tx, Treatment; γ-GT, γ-glutamyl transpeptidase.

and elevated AFP among those with HCC. The proportion of males was significantly higher among the HCC cases in the HCV group. Stiffness of the liver was significantly greater among the HCC cases in all groups.

## Determining cut-off values related to HCC concurrence in each disease group

The cut-off value most related to HCC concurrence was determined by the ROC analysis in each disease group. It was set at more than 12.0 kPa (>12.0 kPa vs  $\leq$ 12.0 kPa; odds ratio [OR], 14.7; P < 0.001) in the HCV group, at more than 8.5 kPa (>8.5 kPa vs  $\leq$ 8.5 kPa; OR, 8.28; P < 0.001) in the HBV group and at more than 12.0 kPa (>12.0 kPa vs  $\leq$ 12.0 kPa; OR, 4.67; P < 0.001) in the NBNC group (Fig. 1).

#### **HCC** concurrence-related factors

Hepatocellular carcinoma concurrence-related factors in the HCV group were examined. Univariate analysis revealed that age, sex, Alb, total bilirubin, aspartate aminotransferase (AST),  $\gamma$ -glutamyltransferase ( $\gamma$ -GT), Plt, AFP and liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa were significant factors (Table 2). With the significant factors extracted by univariate analysis, multivariate analysis was performed, and age, sex, Alb, Plt and liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa were independent factors

(Table 3). Liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was significant with an OR of 4.53 (P < 0.001).

Hepatitis C virus patients were categorized into two groups according to liver stiffness of 12.0 kPa or less, and more than 12.0 kPa, and HCC concurrence-related factors were examined in each group. Multivariate analysis extracted age, sex, Alb and AFP in the group with liver stiffness of 12.0 kPa or less as independent factors, and age, Alb and Plt in the group with liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa (Table 3).

In the HBV group, HCC concurrence-related factors were examined. Univariate analysis revealed that age, Alb,  $\gamma$ -GT, Plt, AFP and liver stiffness of more than 8.5 kPa were significant factors (Table 2), and multivariate analysis extracted age as an independent factor (OR, 1.12 [range, 1.04–1.21], P < 0.004) while low Plt tended to be associated with a high risk for HCC occurrence (OR, 0.99 [range, 0.98–1.00], P = 0.08) (data not shown). Subgroup analysis showed that liver stiffness of more than 8.5 kPa was a significant factor for HCC concurrence irrespective of age of more than 60 years or 60 years or less, and Plt less than  $150 \times 10^9$ /L or  $150 \times 10^9$ /L or more (Fig. 2).

Also examined were HCC concurrence-related factors in the NBNC group. Univariate analysis revealed that Alb, Plt, AFP and liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa

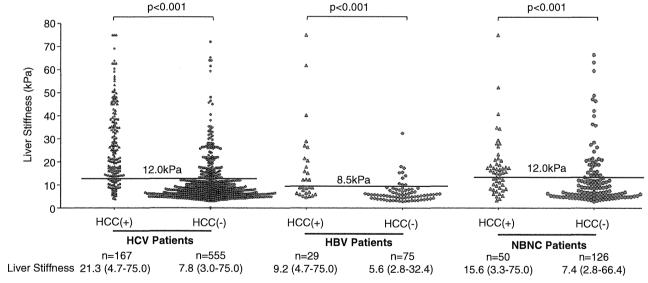


Figure 1 Distribution of liver stiffness categorized by the presence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). Distribution of liver stiffness is shown in cases with liver disease of different etiologies with and without HCC. The cut-off value for liver stiffness was calculated so that sensitivity plus specificity would be the largest. A horizontal line indicating the cut-off value was drawn separately in each etiology group with an insertion of the value. Liver stiffness is shown as the median (range). Liver stiffness scores were significantly higher in cases with HCC concurrence. HBV, hepatitis B virus; HCV, hepatitis C virus; NBNC, non-B, non-C.

Table 2 Factors related to HCC: univariate analysis

| Factors                    | НС   | V patients (n = | = 722)  | HBV patients $(n = 104)$ |             |         | NBNC patients $(n = 176)$ |             |         |  |
|----------------------------|------|-----------------|---------|--------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------------|-------------|---------|--|
|                            | OR   | 95% CI          | P       | OR                       | 95% CI      | P       | OR                        | 95% CI      | P       |  |
| Age (years)                | 1.13 | 1.11-1.16       | < 0.001 | 1.09                     | 1.04-1.14   | < 0.001 | 1.07                      | 1.04-1.12   | < 0.001 |  |
| Sex (male)                 | 1.84 | 1.28 - 2.64     | 0.001   | 2.28                     | 0.83-6.29   | 0.110   | 1.66                      | 0.84 - 3.27 | 0.147   |  |
| Alb (g/dL)                 | 0.07 | 0.04 - 0.11     | < 0.001 | 0.20                     | 0.07-0.59   | 0.003   | 0.33                      | 0.17-0.63   | < 0.001 |  |
| T-Bil (mg/dL)              | 1.53 | 1.09-2.14       | 0.014   | 1.20                     | 0.24-6.02   | 0.826   | 0.80                      | 0.32-2.03   | 0.639   |  |
| AST (U/L)                  | 1.01 | 1.01 - 1.02     | < 0.001 | 1.01                     | 0.99 - 1.02 | 0.431   | 1.00                      | 0.99 - 1.01 | 0.554   |  |
| ALT (U/L)                  | 1.00 | 0.99 - 1.01     | 0.103   | 0.99                     | 0.99 - 1.01 | 0.868   | 0.99                      | 0.98 - 1.00 | 0.281   |  |
| γ-GT (U/L)                 | 1.00 | 1.00 - 1.01     | 0.005   | 1.02                     | 1.01-1.03   | 0.003   | 1.00                      | 0.99 - 1.00 | 0.392   |  |
| Plt (10°/L)                | 0.98 | 0.97 - 0.98     | < 0.001 | 0.98                     | 0.97 - 0.99 | 0.001   | 0.99                      | 0.98 - 0.99 | < 0.001 |  |
| AFP (ng/mL)                | 1.01 | 1.01 - 1.02     | < 0.001 | 1.04                     | 1.00 - 1.08 | 0.033   | 1.14                      | 1.04 - 1.26 | 0.007   |  |
| Stiffness > cut-off value* | 14.3 | 9.27-22.1       | < 0.001 | 7.13                     | 2.76-18.4   | < 0.001 | 4.67                      | 2.32-9.40   | < 0.001 |  |
| Hx of IFN Tx (yes/no)      | 0.77 | 0.51 - 1.15     | 0.208   | -                        | -           | _       |                           | _           | -       |  |
| SVR patients               | 0.56 | 0.28 - 1.13     | 0.108   | _                        | _           | ***     |                           | _           |         |  |
| NA Tx                      | _    | _               | _       | 1.48                     | 0.63 - 3.51 | 0.369   |                           | _           | -       |  |
| HBV DNA >4 log copies/mL   | -    |                 |         | 0.21                     | 0.05 - 1.01 | 0.051   | -                         | -           | _       |  |

<sup>\*</sup>The cut-off value is 8.5 kPa in HBV patients, and 12.0 kPa in HCV and NBNC patients.

were significant factors (Table 2), and multivariate analysis extracted age and AFP as independent factors (data not shown). In the subgroup aged more than 65 years and AFP of less than 10 ng/mL, liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was a significant HCC concurrencerelated factor (Fig. 2).

### Risk of HCC development in HCV infection

In the HCV group, the risk of HCC development was evaluated in 470 patients without HCC initially who

were followed up. In contrast, evaluation of the risk of development of HCC was not possible in HBV or NBNC cases because no patient in those groups without HCC initially subsequently developed HCC during this limited observation period. These 470 HCV cases were categorized into those with liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa and 12.0 kPa or less based on the cut-off value determined at the analysis of HCC concurrence, and Kaplan-Meier curves for HCC occurrence were constructed. Five patients developed HCC over a median

Table 3 Factors related to HCC in HCV patients: multivariate analysis

| Factors                  |      | All $(n = 722)$ | !)      | :    | ≤12 kPa ( <i>n</i> = 4 | .2  kPa  (n = 460) |      | >12 kPa (n = 262) |         |  |  |
|--------------------------|------|-----------------|---------|------|------------------------|--------------------|------|-------------------|---------|--|--|
|                          | OR   | 95% CI          | P       | OR   | 95% CI                 | P                  | OR   | 95% CI            | P       |  |  |
| Age (years)              | 1.13 | 1.10-1.17       | <0.001* | 1.12 | 1.07-1.19              | <0.001*            | 1.12 | 1.07-1.16         | <0.001* |  |  |
| Sex (male)               | 3.55 | 1.98-6.39       | <0.001* | 43.4 | 4.88 - 387             | <0.001*            |      |                   |         |  |  |
| Alb (g/dL)               | 0.27 | 0.14 - 0.46     | <0.001* | 0.19 | 0.06-0.63              | 0.007*             | 0.29 | 0.14-0.61         | 0.001*  |  |  |
| T-Bil (mg/dL)            | 1.21 | 0.66-2.22       | 0.526   |      |                        |                    | 1.02 | 0.52-2.02         | 0.946   |  |  |
| AST (U/L)                | 1.00 | 0.99 - 1.00     | 0.419   |      |                        |                    |      |                   |         |  |  |
| ALT (IU/L)               |      |                 |         |      |                        |                    | 0.99 | 0.99 - 1.00       | 0.541   |  |  |
| γ-GT (U/L)               | 1.00 | 0.99 - 1.01     | 0.285   |      |                        |                    |      |                   |         |  |  |
| Plt (10 <sup>9</sup> /L) | 0.99 | 0.98-0.99       | 0.008*  | 0.99 | 0.98 - 1.00            | 0.113              | 0.99 | 0.98 - 0.99       | 0.036*  |  |  |
| AFP (ng/mL)              | 1.00 | 0.99 - 1.01     | 0.138   | 1.10 | 1.01 - 1.19            | 0.028*             | 1.00 | 0.99 - 1.01       | 0.159   |  |  |
| Stiffness >12.0 kPa      | 4.53 | 2.36-8.69       | <0.001* |      | _                      | _                  | _    | _                 | _       |  |  |

<sup>\*</sup>Statistically significant.

<sup>-,</sup> Not applicable; AFP, α-fetoprotein; Alb, albumin; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; HBV patients, HBs antigen positive patients; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HCV patients, HCV antibody positive patients; Hx, history; IFN, interferon; NA, nucleoside analog; NBNC patients, HBs antigen negative and HCV antibody negative patients; Plt, platelet count; stiffness, liver stiffness; SVR, sustained virological response; T-Bil, total bilirubin; Tx, Treatment;  $\gamma$ -GT,  $\gamma$ -glutamyl transpeptidase.

<sup>-,</sup> Not applicable; AFP, α-fetoprotein; Alb, albumin; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CI, confidence interval; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HCV, hepatitis C virus; IFN, interferon; NA, nucleoside analog; OR, odds ratio; Plt, platelet count; stiffness, liver stiffness; SVR, sustained virological response; T-Bil, total bilirubin; γ-GT, γ-glutamyl transpeptidase.

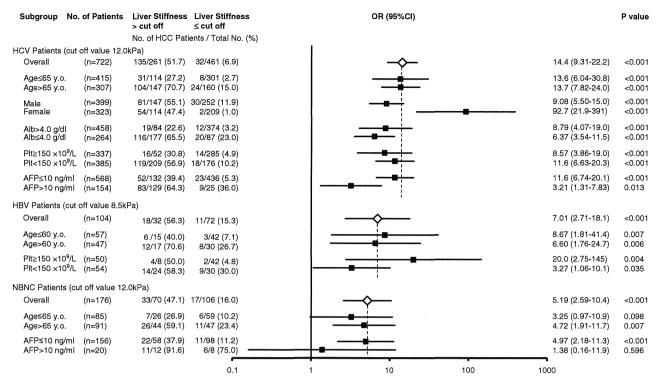


Figure 2 Odds ratio (OR) for the presence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) in specified subgroups associated with liver stiffness over the cut-off value. The OR (95% confidence interval [CI]) for HCC and a *P*-value are shown for each subgroup of hepatitis C virus (HCV) patients with liver stiffness >12.0 kPa, hepatitis B virus (HBV) patients with liver stiffness >8.5 kPa and non-B, non-C (NBNC) liver disease patients with liver stiffness >12.0 kPa. Liver stiffness >12.0 kPa was a HCC concurrence-related factor in all subgroups of HCV patients. In particular, the association was stronger in females than in males. In HBV patients, liver stiffness >8.5 kPa was associated with HCC concurrence irrespective of age >60 years or ≤60 years and platelets (Plt) ≥150 × 10<sup>9</sup>/L or <150 × 10<sup>9</sup>/L. In NBNC patients, liver stiffness >12.0 kPa was associated with HCC concurrence in the subcategory of age >65 years and α-fetoprotein (AFP) ≤10 ng/mL.

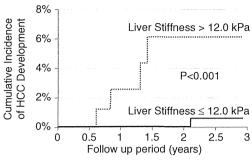
follow-up period of 691 days. The incidence of HCC development was significantly higher among cases with liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa than among those with liver stiffness of 12.0 kPa or less (P < 0.001, by log-rank test) (Fig. 3).

Factors related to HCC development were examined, and univariate analysis extracted elevated AST, elevated AFP and liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa as significant factors, and multivariate analysis revealed that liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was an independent factor. A history of interferon treatment and a SVR were not independent risk factors (Table 4). Cumulative incidence of HCC development was 2.5% in 1 year and 6.1% in 2 years (2.63% per person•year) in patients with liver stiffness of more than 12 kPa. In those with liver stiffness of 12.0 kPa or less, it was 0% in 1 year and 0% in 2 years (0.15% per person•year).

### DISCUSSION

WE FOUND THAT stiffness of the liver was significantly greater in those with HCC in the HCV, HBV and NBNC groups than among cases without HCC. In the HCV group, liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was the most appropriate cut-off value for HCC concurrence producing the highest OR and the stiffness significantly correlated with HCC development. Likewise, liver stiffness of more than 8.5 kPa and more than 12.0 kPa were the most appropriate cut-off values associated with HCC concurrence in the HBV group and the NBNC group, respectively.

FibroScan has been widely used as a non-invasive measurement system for liver fibrosis. The most appropriate cut-off value for diagnosis of liver cirrhosis was 11.8–15.9 kPa with sensitivity ranging 79–87% and



No. at risk Liver Stiffness ≤ 12.0 kPa 366 326 278 248 175 122 50 Liver Stiffness > 12.0 kPa 104 85

Figure 3 Cumulative incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) development in hepatitis C virus patients. Cumulative incidence of HCC development in cases with liver stiffness >12 kPa and ≤12 kPa is shown. Four and one case developed HCC among cases with liver stiffness >12 kPa and ≤12 kPa, respectively. Liver stiffness >12 kPa was associated with a significantly higher risk of HCC development than liver stiffness  $\leq$ 12 kPa (P < 0.001). No case with liver stiffness  $\leq$ 12 kPa developed HCC for at least 2 years.

specificity 81-95% in the HCV cases, 11.7 kPa with a sensitivity of 84.6% and specificity of 81.5% in the HBV cases, 17,21-23 and 10.3-17.5 kPa with sensitivity ranging 92-100% and specificity 88-97% in non-alcoholic fatty liver disease cases.8,11,24 On the other hand, the value for liver stiffness most significantly related to HCC concurrence not to liver cirrhosis in each disease group remains elusive. 16,18,25

The present analysis revealed that the cut-off value most closely associated with HCC concurrence was 12.0 kPa in the HCV group. Masuzaki et al. reported that HCC concurrence was more frequent in the presence of a firmer liver, but presented no appropriate cut-off value.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Akima et al. and Kuo et al. reported that 12.5 kPa and 12.0 kPa were, respectively, the most appropriate cut-off values for HCC concurrence. However, their studies included heterogeneous etiologies and the cut-off level was not examined separately according to each etiology. 13,16 On the other hand, these cut-off values were almost comparable with the cut-off of 12.0 kPa in the present study because most cases in these studies were positive for HCV. The cut-off level for liver stiffness at 12.0 kPa, which was most closely associated with HCC concurrence in the present study, was almost comparable to the minimum cut-off level of liver stiffness for diagnosis of liver cirrhosis. In HCV positive cases, HCC concurrence was more frequent in cases with a histological semiquantitative diagnosis of fibrosis at F4 (liver cirrhosis) by liver biopsy. 6,26,27 These clinical observations were consistent with the quantitative results of the present study.

In the HCV group, liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was associated with HCC concurrence independently of other factors associated with HCC concurrence, such as age, sex, Alb and Plt (Table 3). It has been reported that male sex and old age were risk factors for HCC independent of liver fibrosis. 6,28-30 Although it is presumed that low Alb and Plt are indirectly implicated in the advancement to liver cirrhosis, liver stiffness was independent of those factors and may reflect the risk for HCC directly related to fibrosis. Subgroup analysis (Fig. 2) revealed that liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was more closely associated with HCC concurrence in females than in males. It was elucidated that HCC development was more closely associated with advancement of liver fibrosis in females and that measurement of liver stiffness in females was more useful than in males.

Although it is rare, some HCV positive cases develop HCC before clinical advancement to liver cirrhosis, and the clinical characteristics of such cases have been poorly investigated. To investigate HCC concurrencerelated factors, we categorized HCV positive cases into two groups according to liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa and 12.0 kPa or less (Table 3). In those with mild liver fibrosis with liver stiffness of 12.0 kPa or less, old age, male sex, low Alb and elevated AFP were HCC concurrence-related factors. It was suggested that the risk of developing HCC was increased even in cases with mild liver fibrosis as long as those factors were present. Recently, it was reported that metabolic factors such as diabetes and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis are associated with HCC development independently of liver fibrosis.31-33 It is necessary to further investigate how metabolic factors influence HCC development in patients with mild liver fibrosis and low values for measurements of liver stiffness.

Furthermore, in the HCV group, 470 cases without HCC were followed up (median, 691 days), and liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa was the only independent factor for HCC development (hazard ratio, 12.3; 95% confidence interval, 1.27-132) (Table 4). Curves for cumulative incidence of HCC development revealed that HCC development rates were significantly different between cases with liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa and 12.0 kPa or less (P < 0.001; log-rank test) and that HCC developed beginning 6 months after measurements in cases with liver stiffness of more than 12.0 kPa, whereas no HCC developed for at least 2 years in cases

Table 4 Factors related to HCC development in HCV patients

| Factors                 | Patients who developed HCC | Patients who did not develop HCC |      | Univariate  | 2       | Multivariate |             |        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|------|-------------|---------|--------------|-------------|--------|
|                         | n = 5                      | n = 465                          | HR   | 95% CI      | P       | HR           | 95% CI      | P      |
| Age (years)             | 60 (51–72)                 | 61 (20–88)                       | 1.01 | 0.93-1.10   | 0.837   |              |             |        |
| Sex (male)              | 4 (80.0%)                  | 245 (52.7%)                      | 4.49 | 0.50-40.3   | 0.180   |              |             |        |
| Alb (g/dL)              | 4.6 (3.4-4.8)              | 4.3 (2.1–5.3)                    | 1.56 | 0.16-15.7   | 0.705   |              |             |        |
| T-Bil (mg/dL)           | 1.2 (0.5–2.4)              | 0.6 (0.2–26.9)                   | 1.10 | 0.86 - 1.40 | 0.442   |              |             |        |
| AST (U/L)               | 84 (19–131)                | 32 (8–262)                       | 1.02 | 1.00 - 1.03 | 0.013*  | 1.01         | 0.99 - 1.02 | 0.358  |
| ALT (U/L)               | 49 (13–163)                | 31 (2–334)                       | 1.01 | 0.99 - 1.02 | 0.179   |              |             |        |
| γ-GT (U/L)              | 51 (12–130)                | 28 (9–354)                       | 1.01 | 0.99-1.02   | 0.223   |              |             |        |
| Plt (10°/L)             | 98 (82–173)                | 156 (43–343)                     | 0.98 | 0.97 - 1.00 | 0.128   |              |             |        |
| AFP (ng/mL)             | 6.2 (2.1–272.8)            | 3.5 (0.8–839)                    | 1.00 | 1.00 - 1.01 | 0.025*  | 1.00         | 0.99-1.01   | 0.271  |
| History of IFN          | 3 (60.0%)                  | 256 (55.1%)                      | 0.62 | 0.10 - 3.87 | 0.609   |              |             |        |
| SVR patients            | 1 (20.0%)                  | 124 (26.7%)                      | 0.38 | 0.04 - 3.45 | 0.388   |              |             |        |
| Stiffness >12.0 kPa     | 4 (80.0%)                  | 103 (22.2%)                      | 18.9 | 2.10-171    | <0.001* | 12.9         | 1.27-132    | 0.031* |
| Follow-up period (days) | 477 (223–963)              | 691 (23–1069)                    | _    |             | _       | _            |             | _      |

<sup>\*</sup>Statistically significant.

Values are expressed as the mean (range) or n (%).

<sup>-,</sup> Not applicable; AFP, α-fetoprotein; Alb, albumin; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CI, confidence interval; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HCV, hepatitis C virus; HR, hazards ratio; IFN, interferon; NA, nucleoside analog; Plt, platelet count; stiffness, liver stiffness; SVR, sustained virological response; T-Bil, total bilirubin; γ-GT, γ-glutamyl transpeptidase.