0.05 IU/ml and upper limit of detection of 250 IU/ml. To expand the upper range from 250 to 125,000 IU/ml, serum samples with the HBsAg levels above the upper range were diluted in a stepwise fashion to 1:20 and 1:500 with Architect diluents using the information supplied by the manufacturer. HBeAg was determined by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay kit (HBeAg EIA; Institute of Immunology, Tokyo, Japan). Serum HBcrAg level was measured using a Cleia HBcrAg assay kit (Fujirebio, Tokyo, Japan) using a fully automated analyzer system (Lumipulse System; Fujirebio). The cut-off value of HBcrAg was 3.0 log U/ml. HBV DNA was quantified using the Cobas TaqMan HBV v.2.0 (Roche Diagnostics, Tokyo, Japan), which has a dynamic range of 2.1–9.0 log copies/ml.

A commercial kit (HBV Genotype EIA; Institute of Immunology) was used to determine serologically the HBV genotypes using the combination of epitopes expressed on the pre-S2 region product, which is specific to each of the major genotypes.

Follow-Up and Diagnosis of Future Hepatocellular Carcinoma

After the initial visit, patients were followed-up once or three times a month. Imaging studies (ultrasonography, computed tomography, or magnetic resonance imaging) were conducted once or more per year.

Statistical Analysis

Non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney *U*-test, chi-squared test and Fisher's exact probability test) were used to compare differences between two groups. Correlation analysis was evaluated by the Spearman rank correlation test. The cumulative rate of hepatocarcinogenesis was calculated using the Kaplan–Meier technique; differences between cumulative carcinogenesis curves between groups were tested using the log-rank test. Statistical analyses of the rate of hepatocarcinogenesis according to groups were calculated using the period from the initial visit. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were used to determine the independent surrogate markers of elevated AFP at the initial visit. The odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI) were also calculated. A two-tailed *P*-value less than 0.05 was considered significant. Variables that achieved statistical significance ($P < 0.05$) on univariate analysis were entered into multiple logistic regression analysis to identify significant independent factors for elevated AFP. Potential surrogate markers of elevated AFP at the initial visit included the following pretreatment variables: age, sex, family history of liver disease, lifetime cumulative alcohol intake, total bilirubin, aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alanine aminotransferase (ALT), albumin, gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (GGT), hemoglobin, platelet count, HBV genotype, HBeAg, HBsAg levels, HBcrAg levels, and HBV DNA levels. Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL).

RESULTS

Cumulative Rate of Hepatocarcinogenesis According to the AFP Level at the Initial Visit

A total of 1,061 patients naïve to antiviral therapy from the initial visit until the last visit were evaluated for the rate of development of HCC based on the AFP levels at the initial visit. During the follow-up period, HCC was diagnosed in 31 of 905 patients (3.4%) with a low AFP level (≤10 μg/L; below the upper limit of normal) and 37 of 156 patients (23.7%) with a high AFP level (≥11 μg/L) at the initial visit. The cumulative hepatocarcinogenesis rates for patients with low and high AFP levels at the initial visit were 4.7% and 30.2% at the end of 10-year follow-up; 9.1% and 36.5% at the end of 20-year follow-up; and 13.2% and 42.9% at the end of 30-year follow-up, respectively. These results indicate that the rate of hepatocarcinogenesis is significantly higher in patients with HBV infection and high AFP levels than their counterparts with low AFP levels ($P < 0.001$; Log-rank test) (Fig. 1).

HBsAg and AFP Levels at the Initial Visit

Blood samples from all patients were analyzed to determine the relationship between the HBsAg and the AFP levels at the initial visit. The proportions of patients with high AFP levels among those with the HBsAg levels below 500 IU/ml, from 500 to 1,999 IU/ml, from 2,000 to 6,999 IU/ml, from 7,000 to 24,999 IU/ml, and above 25,000 IU/ml were 12.6% (42 of 333 patients), 26.7% (89 of 333), 22.6% (94 of 416), 10.4% (29 of 278), and 6.4% (16 of 250), respectively (Fig. 2A). The relationship between the HBsAg and

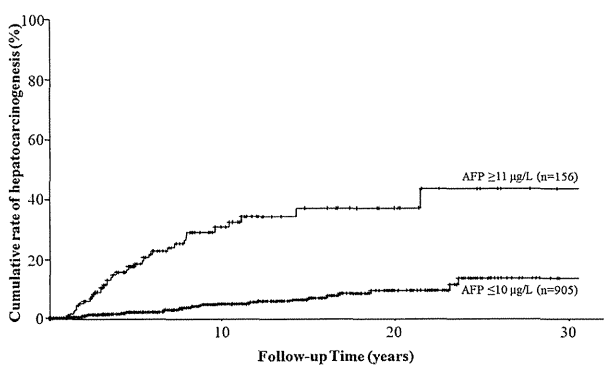

Fig. 1. Cumulative rate of hepatocarcinogenesis according to the AFP level at the initial visit in patients naïve to antiviral therapy from the initial visit until the last visit. The rate of hepatocarcinogenesis was significantly higher in patients with high AFP levels (≥11 μg/L) than in those with low levels (≤10 μg/L) at the initial visit ($P < 0.001$; Log-rank test).

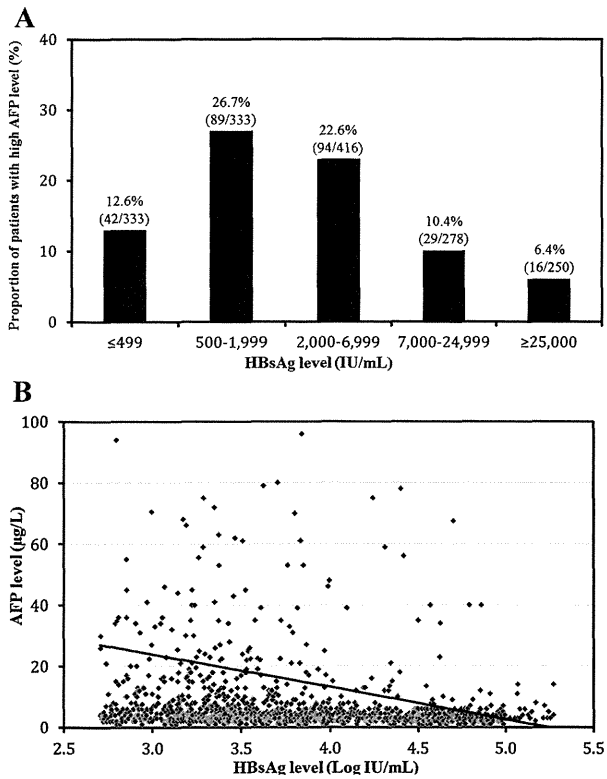

Fig. 2. **A**: Proportions of patients with the high AFP levels (≥11 μg/L) at the initial visit, stratified according to the HBsAg levels. Patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml included a significantly lower proportions of patients with the high AFP levels and the HBsAg levels above 7,000 IU/ml (8.5%) than those with the HBsAg levels below 7,000 IU/ml (24.4%) ($P < 0.001$). **B**: Analysis of data of patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml at the initial visit, showed a significant negative correlation between logarithmically transformed HBsAg and AFP levels ($r = -0.225$, $P < 0.001$).

the AFP levels at the initial visit suggested the presence of two distinct populations within the study group. Especially, in 1,277 patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml, a significantly smaller proportion of patients with high AFP levels were noted among those with HBsAg of more than 7,000 IU/ml (8.5%) than those with the HBsAg levels less than 7,000 IU/ml (24.4%) ($P < 0.001$). Furthermore, the HBsAg levels correlated negatively but significantly with the AFP levels ($r = -0.225$, $P < 0.001$) (Fig. 2B).

The HBsAg Levels and the Platelet Count at the Initial Visit

Blood samples from all patients were analyzed to determine the relationship between the HBsAg levels and the platelet count at the initial visit. The median platelet counts among patients with the HBsAg levels below 500 IU/ml, from 500 to 1,999 IU/ml, from 2,000 to 6,999 IU/ml, from 7,000 to 24,999 IU/ml, and above 25,000 IU/ml were $19.1 \times 10^4/mm^3$, $17.2 \times 10^4/mm^3$, $18.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$, $20.9 \times 10^4/mm^3$, and $21.2 \times 10^4/mm^3$, respectively (Fig. 3A). The relationship between the HBsAg levels and the platelet count at the initial visit also suggested the presence of two distinct populations within the study group. Especially, in 1,277 patients with the HBsAg levels of more than 500 IU/ml, significantly higher platelet counts were noted among those with the HBsAg levels of more than 7,000 IU/ml (the median platelet count; $21.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$) than those with the HBsAg levels less than 7,000 IU/ml (the median platelet count; $17.6 \times 10^4/mm^3$) ($P < 0.001$). Furthermore, the HBsAg

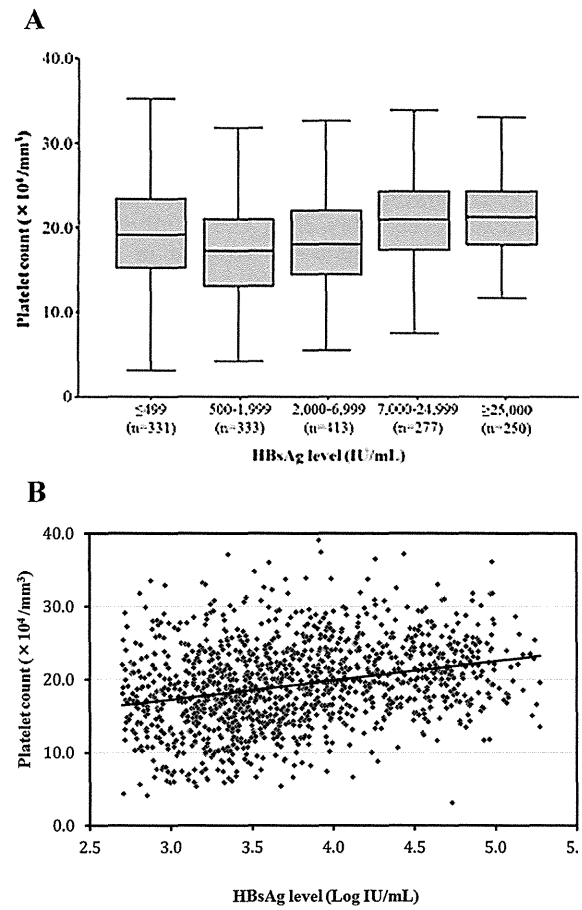

Fig. 3. **A**: The platelet count at the initial visit, stratified according to the HBsAg levels. Bars within the boxes indicate the median platelet count. The boxes denote the 25th to 75th percentiles, the lower and upper bars the 10th and 90th percentiles, respectively. Among patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml at the initial visit, those with the HBsAg levels above 7,000 IU/ml had significantly higher platelet count (the median platelet count; $21.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$) compared to those with the HBsAg levels below 7,000 IU/ml (the median platelet count; $17.6 \times 10^4/mm^3$) ($P < 0.001$). **B**: Among patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml at the initial visit, logarithmically transformed the HBsAg levels correlated significantly with the platelet count ($r = 0.293$, $P < 0.001$).

levels correlated significantly and positively with the platelet count ($r = 0.293$, $P < 0.001$) (Fig. 3B).

Clinical Profiles and Laboratory Data According to the HBsAg Level at the Initial Visit

Table II summarizes the clinical profiles and laboratory data according to the HBsAg level at the initial visit of 1,610 patients infected with HBV. Patients with the HBsAg levels below 500 IU/ml were significantly older and exhibited lower inflammatory activity (lower levels of AST and ALT), and had lower viral levels (they were HBeAg negative and had lower levels of HBcrAg/HBV DNA), compared to those with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml ($P < 0.001$).

Factors Associated With High AFP Levels at the Initial Visit, Stratified According to the HBsAg Levels

Blood samples from all 1,610 patients were analyzed to determine the factors that affect the AFP level at the initial visit. Among 1,277 patients with the HBsAg levels more than 500 IU/ml at the initial visit, high AFP levels were detected in 228 (17.9%) patients. Univariate analysis identified 12 parameters that correlated significantly with a high AFP level at the initial visit. These included age (≥30 years; $P < 0.001$), AST (≥34 IU/L; $P < 0.001$), ALT (≥43 IU/L; $P < 0.001$), albumin (<3.9 g/dl; $P < 0.001$), GGT (≥50 IU/L; $P < 0.001$), total bilirubin (≥1.0 mg/dl; $P < 0.001$), platelet count ($<20.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$; $P < 0.001$), HBV genotype (C; $P < 0.001$), HBsAg levels (<7,000 IU/ml; $P < 0.001$), HBeAg (positive; $P < 0.001$), HBV DNA (≥5.0 log copies/ml; $P < 0.001$), and HBcrAg (≥3.0 log U/ml; $P < 0.001$). Multivariate analysis that included the above variables identified seven factors that influenced independently the elevated AFP level at the initial visit. These included HBsAg level (<7,000 IU/ml; OR 3.69, $P < 0.001$), albumin (<3.9 g/dl; OR 3.09, $P < 0.001$), platelet count ($<20.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$; OR 2.50, $P = 0.001$), GGT (≥50 IU/L; OR 2.28, $P = 0.001$), AST (≥34 IU/L; OR 2.77, $P = 0.003$), HBeAg (positive; OR 2.07, $P = 0.005$), and HBcrAg (≥3.0 log U/ml; OR 5.10, $P = 0.031$) (Table III).

Among 333 patients with the HBsAg levels less than 500 IU/ml, a high AFP at the initial visit was detected in 42 (12.6%) patients. Univariate analysis identified nine parameters that correlated significantly with a high AFP level at the initial visit. These included AST (≥34 IU/L; $P < 0.001$), ALT (≥43 IU/L; $P = 0.001$), albumin (<3.9 g/dl; $P < 0.001$), GGT (≥50 IU/L; $P < 0.001$), platelet count ($<20.0 \times 10^4/mm^3$; $P = 0.001$), HBV genotype (C; $P < 0.001$), HBeAg (positive; $P < 0.001$), HBV DNA (≥5.0 log copies/ml; $P = 0.001$), and HBcrAg (≥3.0 log U/ml; $P < 0.001$). Multivariate analysis that included the above variables identified three factors that influenced independently the elevated AFP level at the initial visit. These included albumin (<3.9 g/dl; OR 12.8, $P < 0.001$), GGT (≥50 IU/L; OR 6.95, $P = 0.002$), and HBcrAg (≥3.0 log U/ml; OR 5.62, $P = 0.010$) (Table III).

Factors Associated With High AFP Levels at the Initial Visit According to the HBsAg Levels in Patients With Low Transaminase Levels

To minimize the effect of inflammatory activity, we examined the data of 618 (among 1,610 patients) who

TABLE II. Profiles and Laboratory Data of Patients Infected With HBV According to the HBsAg Level at the Initial Visit

	HBsAg <500 IU/L	HBsAg ≥500 IU/L	*P*
Demographic data			
Number of patients	333	1,277	
Sex (male/female)	227/106	820/457	NS
Age (years)*	49 (18–75)	38 (18–83)	<0.001
Family history of liver disease[a]	130 (39.0%)	706 (55.3%)	<0.001
Lifetime cumulative alcohol intake (≥500 kg)	32 (9.6%)	80 (6.3%)	0.037
Laboratory data*			
Total bilirubin (mg/dl)	0.7 (0.2–2.9)	0.6 (0.1–2.9)	0.033
Aspartate aminotransferase (IU/L)	29 (12–175)	40 (5–220)	<0.001
Alanine aminotransferase (IU/L)	32 (7–289)	56 (5–297)	<0.001
Albumin (g/dl)	4.2 (1.1–5.6)	4.2 (1.0–5.5)	NS
Gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (IU/L)	36 (2–2,370)	38 (4–1,638)	NS
Hemoglobin (g/dl)	14.4 (8.4–17.4)	14.6 (6.9–18.2)	NS
Platelet count ($\times 10^4/mm^3$)	19.1 (2.7–39.6)	19.2 (3.1–44.7)	NS
Alpha-fetoprotein (μg/L)	4 (1–968)	4 (1–1,770)	0.005
Virological data			
HBeAg (No. of positive)	37 (11.1%)	653 (51.1%)	<0.001
HBsAg (IU/ml)*	123 (0.09–498)	4,680 (503 to >125,000)	<0.001
HBcrAg (log U/ml)*	<3.0 (<3.0 to >6.8)	5.9 (<3.0 to >6.8)	<0.001
HBV DNA (log copies/ml)*	3.7 (<2.1 to >9.1)	6.6 (<2.1 to >9.1)	<0.001
HBV genotype (A/B/C/others/ND)	7/104/141/0/81	58/114/978/6/121	<0.001

NS; not significant.
Data are number/percentages of patients, except those denoted by *, which represent the median (range) values.
[a]Family history of positivity for hepatitis B surface antigen including third-degree relatives.

TABLE III. Results of Multivariate Logistic Analysis for Factors Associated With the High AFP Levels at the Initial Visit

Factor	Category	Risk ratio (95%CI)	*P*
Patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml (n = 1,277)			
HBsAg (IU/ml)	1: ≥7,000	1	
	2: <7,000	3.69 (2.12–6.41)	<0.001
Albumin (g/dl)	1: ≥3.9	1	
	2: <3.9	3.09 (1.88–5.05)	<0.001
Platelet count ($\times 10^4$/mm^3)	1: ≥20.0	1	
	2: <20.0	2.50 (1.47–4.24)	0.001
Gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (IU/L)	1: <50	1	
	2: ≥50	2.28 (1.40–3.72)	0.001
Aspartate aminotransferase (IU/L)	1: <34	1	
	2: ≥34	2.77 (1.42–5.39)	0.003
HBeAg	1: Negative	1	
	2: Positive	2.07 (1.24–3.45)	0.005
HBcrAg (log U/ml)	1: <3.0	1	
	2: ≥3.0	5.10 (1.16–22.4)	0.031
Patients with the HBsAg levels below 500 IU/ml (n = 333)			
Albumin (g/dl)	1: ≥3.9	1	
	2: <3.9	12.8 (4.02–41.7)	<0.001
Gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (IU/L)	1: <50	1	
	2: ≥50	6.95 (2.06–23.5)	0.002
HBcrAg (log U/ml)	1: <3.0	1	
	2: ≥3.0	5.62 (1.51–21.0)	0.010

Low transaminase levels were defined as transaminase levels below the upper limit of normal.

had low transaminase levels (AST ≤33 IU/L and ALT ≤42 IU/L, i.e., below the upper limits of normal) to further determine those factors that determine the high level of AFP at the initial visit. High AFP was detected in 26 (6.1%) patients among 426 with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml and low transaminase levels. Using the data of these patients, univariate analysis identified three parameters that correlated significantly with a high AFP level at the initial visit. These included albumin (<3.9 g/dl; $P = 0.004$), platelet count (<20.0 × 10^4/mm^3; $P = 0.012$), and HBsAg levels (<7,000 IU/ml; $P = 0.004$). Multivariate analysis that included the above variables identified albumin (<3.9 g/dl; OR 3.92, $P = 0.001$) and HBsAg levels (<7,000 IU/ml; OR 4.33, $P = 0.004$) as independent determinants of a high AFP level at the initial visit (Table IV).

Among 192 patients with the HBsAg levels below 500 IU/ml and low transaminase levels, high AFP levels were detected at the initial visit in 12 (6.3%). Univariate analysis identified three parameters that influenced significantly the elevated AFP level at the initial visit. These included albumin (<3.9 g/dl; $P = 0.010$), GGT (≥50 IU/L; $P = 0.011$), and platelet count (<20.0 × 10^4/mm^3; $P = 0.020$). Multivariate analysis that included these variables identified albumin (<3.9 g/dl; OR 7.19, $P = 0.004$) as the only independent determinant of a high AFP level at the initial visit (Table IV).

TABLE IV. Results of Multivariate Analysis for Factors Associated With the High AFP Levels at the Initial Visit

Factor	Category	Risk ratio (95%CI)	*P*
Patients with HBsAg >500 IU/ml and low transaminase levels (n = 426)			
Albumin (g/dl)	1: ≥3.9	1	
	2: <3.9	3.92 (1.71–9.01)	0.001
HBsAg (IU/ml)	1: ≥7,000	1	
	2: <7,000	4.33 (1.58–11.9)	0.004
Patients with HBsAg <500 IU/ml and low transaminase levels (n = 192)			
Albumin (g/dl)	1: ≥3.9	1	
	2: <3.9	7.19 (1.87–27.8)	0.004

Low transaminase levels were defined as transaminase levels below the upper limit of normal.

DISCUSSION

There is little information on the cutoff value of AFP that can be used to predict the future probability of HCC in patients with HBV infection. The present study followed-up patients naïve to antiviral therapy from the initial visit and showed that the rate of hepatocarcinogenesis was significantly higher in those with high AFP levels at the baseline than those with low levels. To our knowledge, the present study is the first to report the hepatocarcinogenesis rate stratified according to the AFP level in patients infected with HBV but free of HCC at the initial visit, based on a large-scale long-term follow-up cohort. The results indicated that patients with high AFP levels at the initial visit are at high risk of HCC, and emphasize the need to determine the factors that could affect the AFP level as surrogate markers of early hepatocarcinogenesis. Previous studies in patients with HCV infection indicated that suppression of the AFP level by treatment with interferon reduced the HCC risk even in those without complete eradication of HCV [Arase et al., 2007; Asahina et al., 2013]. However, there is little

evidence that suppression of the AFP level by antiviral therapy reduces the HCC risk in patients with HBV infection. Further prospective studies are needed to investigate this issue in detail.

In the present study, the relationship between the HBsAg levels and the AFP levels detected at the initial visit suggested the presence of two distinct groups within the study patients. Interestingly, in patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml, a significant negative correlation was observed between the HBsAg and the AFP levels, and a significant positive correlation was observed between the HBsAg and the platelet count. Previous studies indicated that high serum AFP levels correlated with liver fibrosis Stage 3 and 4 [Bayati et al., 1998; Chu et al., 2001; Hu et al., 2002, 2004], and that lower thrombocytopenia was closely associated with advanced liver disease [Ikeda et al., 2009; Akuta et al., 2012]. Considered together, these results emphasize the importance of hyper-α-fetoproteinemia and thrombocytopenia in the prediction of severe liver fibrosis, respectively. Based on the present results and the recent reports suggesting the potential correlation between the HBsAg level and the stage of liver fibrosis [Seto et al., 2012; Martinot-Peignoux et al., 2013], it is possible that HBsAg levels could correlate with the stage of fibrosis in patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml. Further studies are needed to determine the value of hyper-α-fetoproteinemia in patients with low and high HBsAgemia.

In addition to the HBsAg level, multivariate analysis also identified HBcrAg as another viral factor that influenced independently the AFP level at the baseline. HBcrAg comprises HBcAg, HBeAg and a 22-kDa precore protein coded with the precore/core gene [Kimura et al., 2002, 2005]. Previous studies reported a significant correlation between serum HBcrAg concentrations and intrahepatic levels of covalently closed circular DNA (cccDNA) [Wong et al., 2007; Suzuki et al., 2009]. Other studies indicated that HBcrAg is a useful predictor of HCC during antiviral therapy [Kumada et al., 2013], and post-treatment recurrence of HCC during antiviral therapy [Hosaka et al., 2010]. The present study, based on patients naïve to antiviral therapy showed that high serum HBcrAg concentrations also correlated with high AFP at the initial visit. This is the first report demonstrating the potential usefulness of HBcrAg as a surrogate marker for early hepatocarcinogenesis.

The impact of the HBsAg level on hepatocarcinogenesis is not clear at this stage. In this study, the effect of the HBsAg levels at the initial visit on HCC was assessed in 1,061 consecutive antiviral therapy-naive patients infected with HBV. Analysis of data of 794 patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml at the initial visit (after exclusion of patients on antiviral therapy) showed a significantly lower cumulative HCC rate in patients with the HBsAg levels above 7,000 IU/ml than those with levels below 7,000 IU/ml ($P < 0.001$, Log-rank test, Fig. 4). This result suggests that HBsAg levels at the baseline do not only influence AFP, but also play a role in hepatocarcinogenesis. Further studies need to be performed to determine the pathomechanisms of HBsAg in hepatocarcinogenesis.

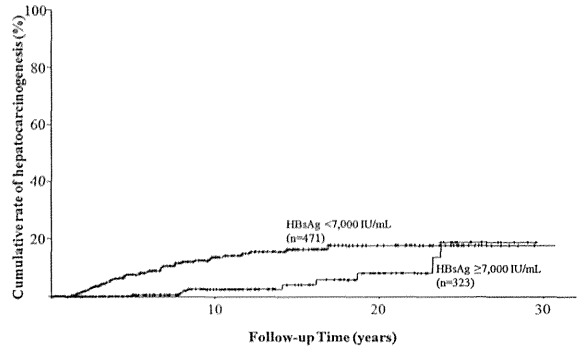

Fig. 4. Cumulative rate of hepatocarcinogenesis stratified according to the HBsAg levels at the initial visit in patients naïve to antiviral therapy from the initial visit until last visit. In a preliminary study based on 794 patients with the HBsAg levels above 500 IU/ml at the initial visit, the cumulative hepatocarcinogenesis rate for patients with the HBsAg levels more than 7,000 IU/ml was significantly lower than for those with levels below 7,000 IU/ml ($P < 0.001$; Log-rank test).

The present study has certain limitations. First, the study did not examine the effects of other genotypes, apart from HBV genotype B or C. Second, the study population was limited to Japanese and did not include other races, and thus generalization of the results to other races cannot be made based on the results. Third, the study did not investigate the effects of antiviral therapy (interferon and/or nucleot(s)ide analogs) on the outcome since such therapy suppressed the AFP levels and thus reduce the risk of HCC in patients with HBV infection.

In conclusion, the present studies demonstrated that the HBsAg level seem to influence the AFP levels and can be used as a surrogate marker for early hepatocarcinogenesis in patients with hepatitis B viral infection.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE—LIVER, PANCREAS, AND BILIARY TRACT

Renal dysfunction and hypophosphatemia during long-term lamivudine plus adefovir dipivoxil therapy in patients with chronic hepatitis B

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Abstract
Background Renal dysfunction and Fanconi's syndrome associated with hypophosphatemia caused by long-term administration of low-dose adefovir dipivoxil (ADV) has been reported in recent years. The aim of this retrospective study was to determine the incidence and factors associated with renal dysfunction and hypophosphatemia in patients with hepatitis B infection on long-term treatment with ADV and lamivudine (LAM).
Methods The study subjects were 292 patients treated with 10 mg/day ADV and 100 mg/day LAM for more than 6 months. We evaluated estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), serum creatinine and serum phosphate level at the start of ADV and every 6 months.
Result During a median treatment duration of 64 months, 28 (9.6 %) patients developed renal impairment (defined as eGFR < 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2), and 73 (27.1 %) developed hypophosphatemia, including 14 with persistent hypophosphatemia. The cumulative incidences of renal impairment at 1, 3, and 5 years were 1.4, 7.5, 10.5 %, respectively, and those of hypophosphatemia were 6.8, 20.6, 26.7 %, respectively. Multivariate analysis identified old age, liver cirrhosis and hypertension as determinants of renal impairment, and male sex, HCC, low baseline serum phosphate as determinants of hypophosphatemia. Three of the 14 patients with persistent hypophosphatemia developed Fanconi's syndrome; their serum creatinine level remained normal, but eGFR was lower than at baseline.
Conclusion Long-term treatment of hepatitis B with low-dose (10 mg/day) ADV and LAM can potentially cause renal impairment and hypophosphatemia. We advocate regular monitoring of serum phosphate and evaluation of eGFR, in addition to serum creatinine, in such patients.

Keywords Adefovir dipivoxil · Hepatitis B virus · Renal dysfunction · Hypophosphatemia · Fanconi's syndrome · Osteomalacia

Abbreviations

ALT	Alanine aminotransferase
AST	Aspartate aminotransferase
BMI	Body mass index
CHB	Chronic hepatitis B
CHBI	Chronic hepatitis B infection
CI	Confidence interval
eGFR	Estimated glomerular filtration rate
HBeAg	Hepatitis B e antigen
HBsAg	Hepatitis B surface antigen
HBV	Hepatitis B virus
HCC	Hepatocellular carcinoma
IFN	Interferon
IP	Inorganic phosphate
LC	Liver cirrhosis

Introduction

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infects more than 350 million people worldwide. Hepatitis B is a leading cause of chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC)

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[1]. The goal of therapy is to reduce HBV replication to limit progressive liver disease and improve the natural history of chronic HBV infection (CHBI) [2]. Oral nucleotide analogs are used for antiviral therapy of patients with CHBI. Lamivudine (LAM) is the first nucleotide analogue indicated for CHBI [3]. However, long-term LAM therapy is associated with emergence of drug-resistant HBV mutation, and relapse of hepatitis [4–7]. Subsequent studies indicated that adefovir dipivoxil (ADV) alone or in combination with LAM provides effective antiviral therapy in patients with LAM-resistant HBV [8, 9]. However, ADV monotherapy of LAM-resistant HBV resulted in the appearance of virological breakthrough due to acquisition of ADV-resistant mutation [10]. Therefore, the Japanese guidelines recommend the use of the combination of ADV and LAM for patients with LAM-resistant HBV [11].

Renal impairment is one of the most serious side effects of ADV. Nephrotoxicity associated with ADV is dose-dependent. In CHBI phase III trials, significant renal toxicity was not observed during a median follow-up period of 64 weeks in patient treated with ADV at 10 mg/day [12]. However, renal dysfunction associated with long-term use of low-dose ADV has been documented in a few reports published in recent years [13–15]. Moreover, a few case reports also described hypophosphatemia associated with Fanconi's syndrome in association with the use of ADV at 10 mg/day [14, 16, 17].

On the other hand, there are only a few studies on the incidence of renal dysfunction and hypophosphatemia during long-term combination therapy of ADV and LAM. In the present study, we investigated the incidence of renal impairment and hypophosphatemia associated with long-term use of ADV–LAM combination in patients with CHBI and defined the characteristics of those patients who developed the above side effects.

Patients and methods

Patients

The study group comprised 292 Japanese patients who were treated with the combination therapy of ADV and LAM between November 2002 and December 2011 at Toranomon Hospital, Tokyo, Japan. Patients were included in this study if they met the following criteria: (1) patients with LAM-refractory CHBI who commenced ADV add-on LAM at Toranomon Hospital; (2) the starting dose of ADV was 10 mg/day; (3) normal renal function at the commencement of ADV (serum creatinine < 1.2 mg/dl and estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) of ≥ 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2); (4) patients who received the combination therapy for more than 6 months. Furthermore, we excluded patients who had history of treatment with other nucleotide analogs and co-infection with hepatitis C virus or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Study protocol

Patients visited our hospital every 1–3 months after the initiation of ADV treatment, and blood samples were obtained at every visit. We evaluated virological and biochemical markers at the start of ADV and every 6 months thereafter. The eGFR was calculated by the Japanese GFR equation [$194 \times Cr^{1.094} \times age^{0.287}$ ($\times 0.739$ for females)]. Renal impairment represented a decrease in eGFR to < 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2, while hypophosphatemia was defined by serum phosphate level of < 2.5 mg/dl. The dosing interval of ADV was modified by the attending physician when serum creatinine level increased to > 1.2 mg/dl. Liver cirrhosis was defined by presence of stage 4 fibrosis on histopathological examination and/or clinical evidence of portal hypertension.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the ethics committee of Toranomon Hospital.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were reported as proportion (%) for categorical variables, and median values (range) for continuous variables. The Mann–Whitney *U* test was used to compare two continuous variables, and Fisher's exact test or Chi square test was used to compare two categorical variables. The cumulative incidences of renal impairment and hypophosphatemia were calculated using the Kaplan–Meier method and group data were evaluated using the log-rank test. The Cox proportional hazard regression model was used to estimate univariate and multivariate risk factors for renal dysfunction and hypophosphatemia. Wilcoxon rank sum test was used to compare changes in the median values of eGFR and serum phosphate. Statistical significance was defined with two-tailed *P* value of < 0.05. Statistical analyses were performed using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version11; SPSS, Chicago, IL).

Results

Baseline characteristics

Table 1 lists the baseline clinical and laboratory characteristics at the start of ADV. The total duration of the combination therapy of ADV and LAM was 64.3 months (range: 6–118). The median age of the patient was 47 years

Table 1 Baseline characteristics

n	292
Age (years)	47 (25–75)
Male sex	228 (78.1 %)
Body weight (kg)	63 (39.9–92.5)
Body mass index (kg/m^2)	22.2 (15.8–36.9)
Treatment duration (months)	64.3 (6.0–118)
Current cirrhosis	67 (22.9 %)
Current and/or history of HCC	48 (16.4 %)
History of diabetes mellitus	17 (5.8 %)
History of hypertension	42 (14.4 %)
Genotype (A/B/C/others or unknown)	13/15/240/24 (4.5/5.1/82.2/8.2 %)
HBeAg (positive/negative/unknown)	114/176/2 (39.0/60.3/0.7 %)
Serum HBV-DNA (logIU/ml)	6.9 (< 2.1 to ≤9.0)
Total bilirubin (mg/dl)	0.7 (0.2–6.0)
Alanine aminotransferase (IU/ml)	86 (9–3156)
Albumin (g/dl)	3.9 (2.4–4.7)
Platelet($\times$ 10^4/mm^3)	16.1 (3.1–45.2)
Creatinine (mg/dl)	0.8 (0.4–1.1)
eGFR (ml/min/1.73 m^2)	85.2 (51.2–179.9)
Inorganic phosphate (mg/dl)	3.2 (1.6–4.6)

Values are expressed as median (range), or number of patient (%)

eGFR estimated glomerular filtration rate, *HCC* hepatocellular carcinoma

(25–75), and patients were mostly men (78.1 %). Sixty-seven (22.9 %) patients had cirrhosis before starting ADV, and 48 patients (16.4 %) had a history of HCC or had HCC at study entry. Forty-two (14.4 %) patients had diabetes mellitus, and 17 (5.4 %) had arterial hypertension. The median body weight was 63 kg (39.9–92.5), and median BMI was 22.2 kg/m^2 (15.8–36.9). Baseline eGFR was 85.2 ml/min/1.73 m^2 (51.2–179.9), and phosphate was 3.2 mg/dl (1.6–4.6).

ADV-induced nephrotoxicity

Frequency of renal impairment

Twenty-eight (9.6 %) patients developed renal impairment during the combination therapy. The eGFR decreased 20–30 % from baseline in 67 (22.9 %) patients, 30–50 % in 54 (18.5 %) patients, and >50 % in 5 (1.7 %) patients. Figure 1 displays the cumulative incidence of renal impairment. Figure 1a shows the time to eGFR of < 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2 (i.e., renal impairment). The 1-, 3-, and 5-year cumulative incidence of renal impairment was 1.4, 7.5, and 10.5 %, respectively. Figure 1b shows the time to reduction in eGFR of ≥30 % from baseline. The 1-, 3-, 5-year

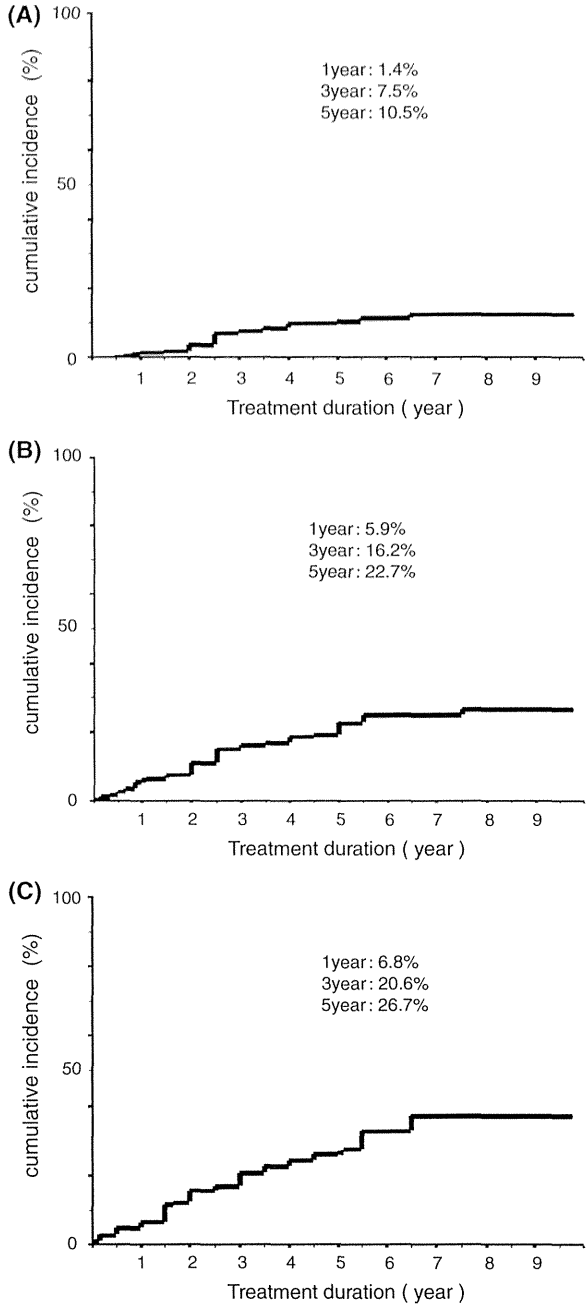

Fig. 1 Cumulative incidence of renal impairment and hypophosphatemia. **a** Cumulative incidence of reduction of eGFR to less than 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2 at 1-, 3-, and 5-years of treatment with ADV and LAM. **b** Cumulative incidence of reduction of eGFR by ≥30 % relative to baseline at 1-, 3-, and 5-years of treatment with ADV and LAM. **c** Cumulative incidence of hypophosphatemia among 269 patients with baseline IP of ≥2.5 mg/dl

cumulative incidence of reduction in eGFR ≥30 % was 5.9, 16.2, 22.7 %, respectively. We also evaluated renal function using serum creatinine. Serum creatinine increased to more

than 1.2 mg/dl in 34 (11.6 %) patients during the study period. The 1-, 3-, and 5-year cumulative incidence of serum creatinine of ≥1.2 mg/dl was 1.4, 6.51, and 11.4 %, respectively. The proportion of patients who developed renal impairment started to increase about 2 years after the commencement of ADV.

Time-course of renal impairment

Figure 2a shows serial changes in the median value of eGFR after the addition of ADV to LAM. We excluded from this analysis those patients in whom the dose of ADV was reduced at the point of modification. The eGFR of 264 patients without renal impairment remained stable throughout the study. On the other hand, the eGFR of 28 patients with renal impairment decreased rapidly within about 2 years after the addition of ADV.

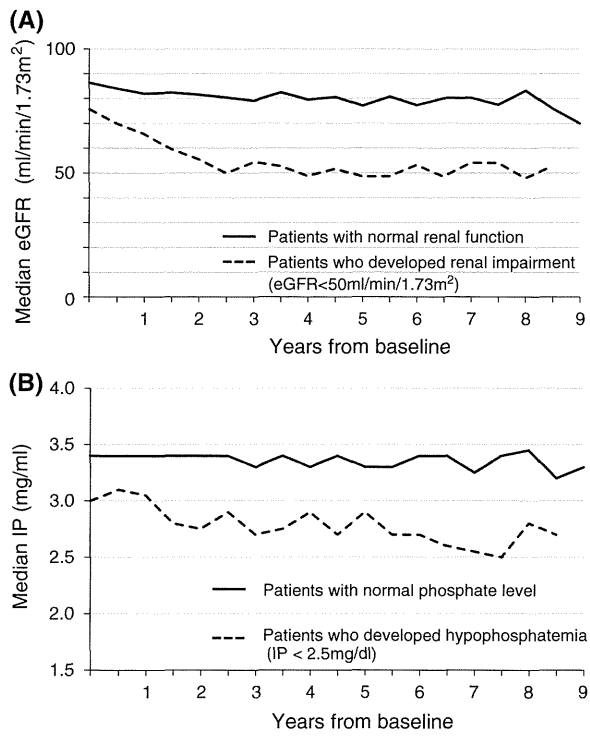

Fig. 2 Clinical course after the addition of ADV to LAM for treatment of chronic hepatitis B infection. **a** Changes in median eGFR level after the addition of ADV to LAM. *Solid line* patients with normal renal function, *broken line* patients who developed renal impairment (excluding patients who required reduction of the dose of ADV at the point). **b** Changes in the median level of serum phosphate after the addition of ADV to LAM. *Solid line* patients with normal phosphate level, broken line: patients who developed hypophosphatemia (excluding patients required reduction of the dose of ADV at the point)

Predictive factors for renal impairment

The results of univariate and multivariate analyses, including the hazard ratio for eGFR to < 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2, are shown in Table 2. Univariate analysis showed that old age (≥ 50 years, $P < 0.0001$), current cirrhosis ($P < 0.0001$), current and/or history of HCC ($P = 0.001$), history of hypertension ($P < 0.0001$), mild renal dysfunction at baseline (eGFR < 80 ml/min/1.73 m^2, $P = 0.001$), and thrombocytopenia (platelet count < 15 × 10^4/mm^3, $P = 0.003$) were associated with the development of nephrotoxicity. Multivariate analysis indicated that old age ($P = 0.006$), cirrhosis ($P = 0.011$), and history of hypertension ($P = 0.005$) were significant predictors of renal impairment.

Univariate and multivariate analyses were also performed for a fall in eGFR of ≥30 % relative to baseline. The results of univariate analysis showed that old age ($P < 0.0001$), female sex ($P = 0.007$), small body weight (< 60 kg, $P = 0.002$), history of diabetes mellitus ($P < 0.0001$), mild renal dysfunction at baseline ($P = 0.018$), hypo-albuminemia ($P = 0.010$), and thrombocytopenia ($P = 0.007$) were associated with decrease in eGFR of ≥30 % relative to baseline. On the other hand, multivariate analysis identified old age ($P < 0.001$), small body weight ($P = 0.015$), history of diabetes mellitus ($P = 0.020$), and mild renal dysfunction at baseline ($P < 0.0001$) as significant predictors of fall in eGFR of ≥30 % relative to baseline.

In either case, old age was a significant contributing factor of ADV-induced renal impairment. History of diabetes mellitus and arterial hypertension were also significant predictors.

Effect of modification of ADV dosing interval on renal impairment

Seventeen (5.8 %) patients required modification of the ADV dosing interval because of renal impairment. The ADV dosing interval was changed from 10 mg every day to 10 mg every other day when creatinine increased to ≥1.2 mg/dl. The clinical characteristics of the 17 patients could be summarized as follows: all were men with a median age of 54 years (35–63), 8 (47.1 %) patients had cirrhosis, 4 (23.5 %) patients had a history of HCC, baseline eGFR was 69.3 ml/min/1.73 m^2 (58.2–89.3), phosphate was 3.3 mg/dl (2.1–3.9), and the median time to modification of ADV dose was 48.5 months (20.7–70.0). Figure 3a shows changes in eGFR and Fig. 3b shows changes in serum phosphate after modification of the ADV dosing interval. The dose modification significantly improved eGFR and serum phosphate as measured at 6 months and 1 year after the modification. Analysis of the

Table 2 Determinants of renal impairment (eGFR less than 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2)

	Univariate analysis		Multivariate analysis	
	HR (95 % CI)	*P* value	HR (95 % CI)	*P* value
Age ≥50 years	7.661 (2.898–20.252)	<0.0001	4.280 (1.505–12.169)	0.006
Male sex	1.227 (0.464–3.236)	0.680		
Body weight < 60 (kg)	1.470 (0.687–3.145)	0.320		
Current cirrhosis	5.344 (2.479–11.518)	<0.0001	2.861 (1.279–6.401)	0.011
Current and/or history of HCC	3.855 (1.788–8.311)	0.001		
History of diabetes mellitus	2.841 (0.982–8.149)	0.054		
History of hypertension	5.116 (2.393–10.938)	<0.0001	3.087 (1.403–6.791)	0.005
Baseline eGFR < 80 (eGFR ≥50)	4.219 (1.786–10.00)	0.001		
Baseline IP < 3.2 mg/dl	1.634 (0.766–3.497)	0.204		
Platelet count < 15 × 10^4/mm^3	3.448 (1.511–7.874)	0.003		

CI confidence interval, *IP* inorganic phosphate, *HCC* hepatocellular carcinoma, *HR* hazard ratio

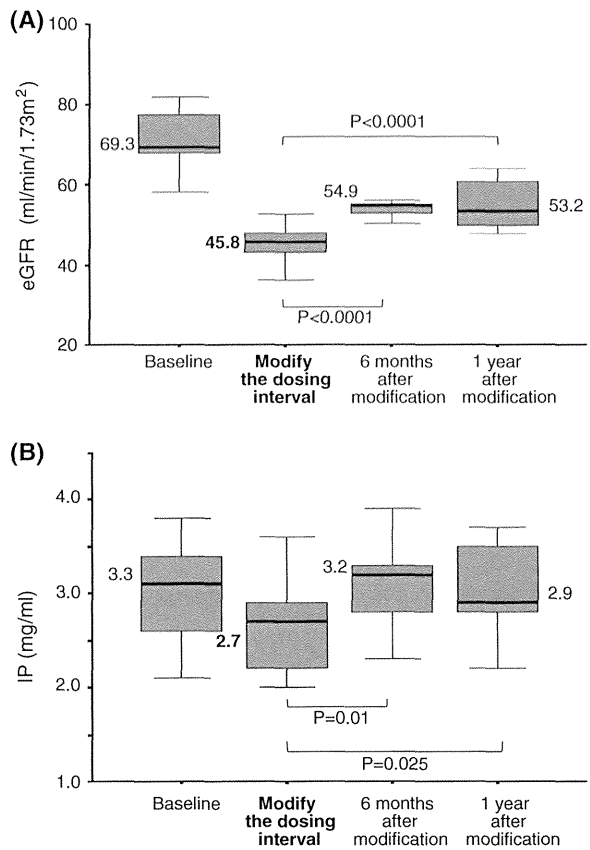

Fig. 3 Changes in eGFR and serum phosphate after modification of the ADV dosing interval. **a** Changes in eGFR. **b** Changes in serum phosphate level

long-term courses of eGFR and phosphate in these 17 patients after modification of ADV showed that the median eGFR after 1-, 2-, and 3- years of modification was 53.2, 56.7, 53.9 ml/min/1.73 m^2, respectively. eGFR remained > 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2 after modification, but never recovered to baseline level. None of the patients required discontinuation of ADV due to renal impairment.

ADV-induced hypophosphatemia

Frequency of hypophosphatemia

Seventy-three (27.1 %) of 269 patients who had normal phosphate at baseline developed hypophosphatemia during the course of the study. Fourteen (19.1 %) of the 73 patients who developed hypophosphatemia continued to show hypophosphatemia until the end of the study. On the other hand, the remaining 59 patients developed transient hypophosphatemia only. The cumulative incidence of hypophosphatemia is shown in Fig. 1c. The 1-, 3-, and 5-year cumulative incidence of hypophosphatemia was 6.8, 20.6, and 26.7 %, respectively. On the other hand, 23 patients had hypophosphatemia at baseline. Seven (30.4 %) of these 23 patients had chronic hypophosphatemia. The phosphate level of 4 (17.4 %) patients reverted spontaneously to normal, while serum phosphate level of the other 12 (52.2 %) patients fluctuated during the study.

Time-course of hypophosphatemia

Figure 2b shows changes in the median serum level of phosphate after the addition of ADV to LAM. We excluded from this analysis those patients in whom the dose of ADV was reduced at the point of modification. The median phosphate level decreased gradually after the addition of ADV in patients who subsequently developed hypophosphatemia.

Predictive factors for hypophosphatemia

Table 3 shows the results of univariate and multivariate analyses, including hazard ratio, of the factors associated

Table 3 Determinants of hypophosphatemia

	Univariate analysis		Multivariate analysis	
	HR (95 % CI)	*P* value	HR (95 % CI)	*P* value
Age ≥50 years	1.325 (0.836–2.100)	0.230		
Male sex	3.690 (1.600–8.475)	0.002	2.824 (1.212–6.759)	0.016
Body weight < 60 kg	1.417 (0.850–2.360)	0.181		
Current cirrhosis	1.854 (1.143–3.008)	0.012		
Current and/or history of HCC	1.824 (1.089–3.054)	0.022	1.871 (1.106–3.166)	0.020
History of diabetes mellitus	1.355 (0.546–3.362)	0.513		
History of hypertension	1.558 (0.870–2.791)	0.136		
Baseline eGFR < 80 (eGFR ≥50)	1.264 (0.788–2.029)	0.332		
Baseline IP < 3.2 mg/dl	3.155 (1.965–5.051)	<0.0001	2.833 (1.751–4.032)	<0.0001
Platelet count < 15 × 10^4/mm^3	1.472 (0.925–2.342)	0.103		

Abbreviations as in Table 2

with a fall in serum phosphate level to < 2.5 mg/dl. Patients with baseline serum phosphate of < 2.5 mg/dl ($n = 23$) were excluded from the analysis. Univariate analysis showed that male sex ($P = 0.002$), cirrhosis ($P = 0.012$), current and/or history of HCC ($P = 0.012$), and low baseline phosphate level ($P < 0.0001$) correlated with hypophosphatemia. On the other hand, multivariate analysis identified male sex ($P = 0.016$), current and/or history of HCC ($P = 0.020$), and low baseline serum phosphate level ($P < 0.0001$) as significant determinants of ADV-induced hypophosphatemia.

Further analysis showed that decreases in eGFR of more ≥30 % relative to the baseline value in 2.5 years correlated significantly with hypophosphatemia ($P = 0.007$).

Effect of modification of ADV dosing interval on hypophosphatemia and liver function

The median serum phosphate level after 1-, 2-, and 3- years of modification of ADV dose was 2.9, 3.1, and 3.0 mg/dl, respectively. Serum phosphate level fluctuated even after the dose modification. We also analyzed changes in serum ALT and HBV-DNA. After ADV dose modification, serum ALT level decreased to within the normal range (ALT < 40 IU/L) in 16 of 17 patients. Although serum ALT level of the remaining single case increased transiently after the modification, it normalized 1 year later. The HBV-DNA level was below the detection level at ADV dose modification in 14 of the 17

Table 4 Clinical features of patients with persistent ADV-induced hypophosphatemia

Case no.	Sex	Age (years)	BW (kg)	LC/CH/HCC	Baseline					Min. IP	Max. ALP	Min. UA	Max. Cr	Fall in eGFR (%)	Ostealgia
					IP	ALP	UA	Cr	eGFR						
1	F	63	64.6	LC/HCC	2.7	323	5.4	0.5	93.3	0.8	1081	1.2	0.9	47.9	+
2	F	73	57.2	CH	3.6	285	4.1	0.5	89.3	1.9	1102	2.2	0.8	41.1	+
3	M	35	61.4	CH	3.9	149	4.3	0.8	89.3	2.2	174	3.4	1.2	37.8	−
4	M	57	66.2	LC/HCC	2.9	361	2.8	0.8	77.7	2.2	742	1.7	1.2	37.1	−
5	F	40	60.4	CH	2.9	259	4.9	0.5	105.8	1.1	1012	2.5	0.7	33.1	−
6	M	47	57.4	CH	3.9	203	3.9	0.7	95.1	1.8	241	3.1	1.0	32.3	−
7	M	50	70.2	LC/HCC	3.4	300	5.4	0.6	110.2	1.1	351	5.3	0.8	29.3	−
8	M	41	80.3	LC/HCC	2.7	206	5.3	0.8	85.3	2.0	268	4.3	1.0	23.2	−
9	M	58	73.0	CH	2.6	259	2.9	0.9	67.8	2.2	378	2.2	1.1	20.5	−
10	M	31	89.0	LC	3.4	180	4.4	0.8	92.2	1.6	502	1.8	0.9	17.7	+
11	M	34	62.9	CH	2.7	111	6.4	0.6	123.7	2.2	179	4.6	0.7	16.2	−
12	M	49	83.0	CH	3.1	442	6.1	0.8	80.9	2.2	383	5.0	0.9	14.5	−
13	M	40	83.9	LC/HCC	3.7	216	6.9	0.9	75.4	1.9	383	6.0	1.0	10.9	−
14	M	39	66.0	CH	4.1	144	6.4	1.0	67.7	2.1	179	6.3	1.1	9.9	−

Fall in eGFR represents fall in eGFR relative to the baseline

BW body weight, *IP* inorganic phosphate, *ALP* alkaline phosphatase, *UA* uric acid, *Cr* creatinine, *LC* liver cirrhosis, *CH* chronic hepatitis, *HCC* hepatocellular carcinoma

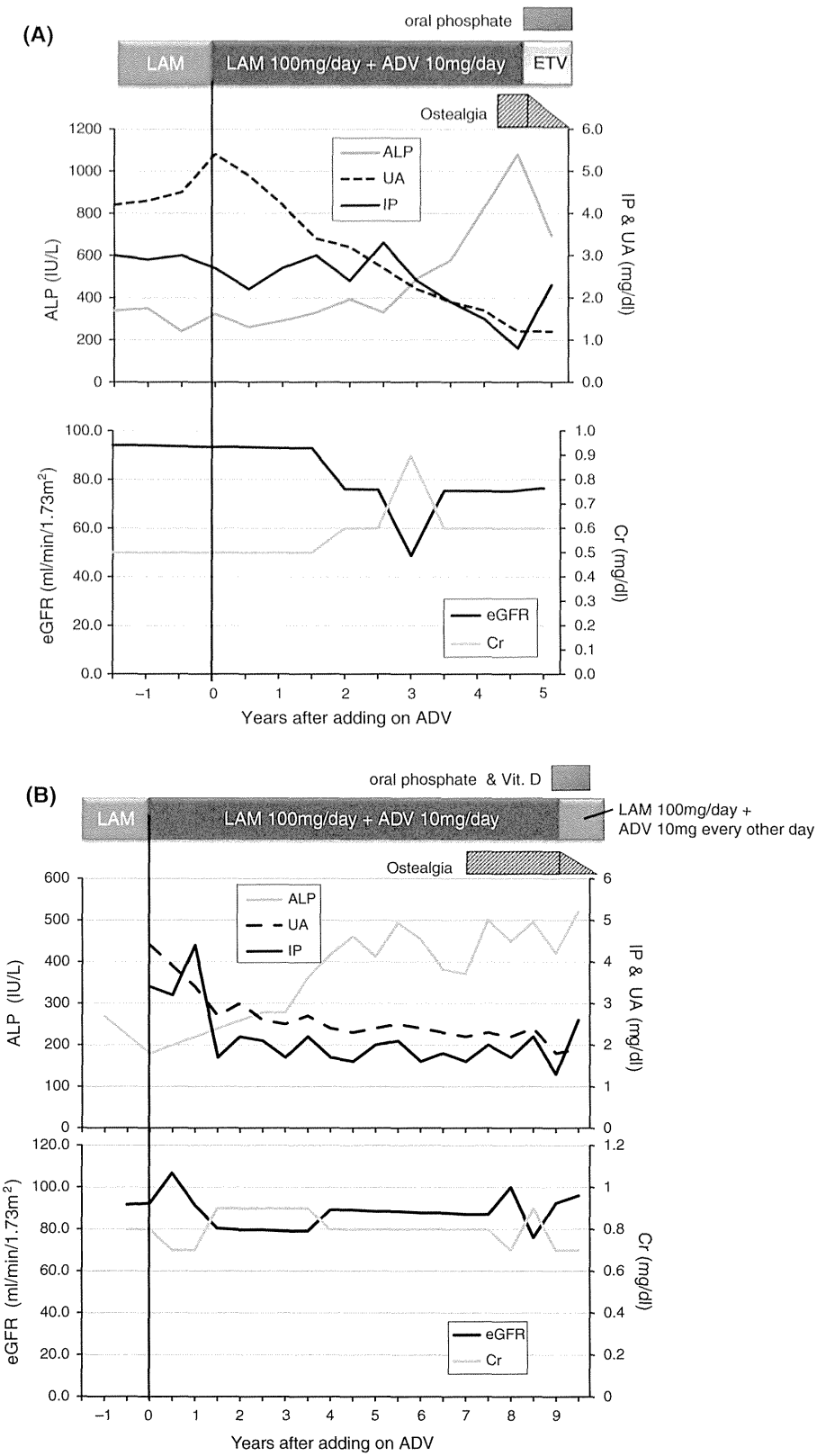

Fig. 4 Two cases who developed Fanconi's syndrome. **a** Case 1: a 63-year-old woman with HBeAg-positive liver cirrhosis. **b** Case 10: a 31 year-old man with HBeAg-positive liver cirrhosis

patients, and the level did not increase after the modification. The remaining three patients with detectable HBV-DNA at modification did not show any change in HBV-DNA.

Patients with persistent hypophosphatemia

Fourteen (5.2 %) patients developed persistent hypophosphatemia. There were no significant differences in clinical features and results of laboratory tests at baseline between patients with transient and persistent hypophosphatemia. Table 4 lists the clinical features of these patients. Three of these patients complained of bone pain during treatment. They had markedly elevated alkaline phosphatase (ALP) and low serum uric acid (UA) levels during the combination therapy. Their serum creatinine level remained normal, but their eGFR decreased relative to baseline. Figure 4 provides a summary of the clinical course of cases 1 and 10.

Case 1 was a 63-year-old woman with HBeAg-positive liver cirrhosis. She was first treated with LAM for chronic hepatitis, but ADV was added 17 months later due to the development of LAM resistance. The laboratory data (serum phosphate, ALP, UA and creatinine) were within normal ranges at baseline, and she had no other health problems. Continuous treatment with ADV for about 3 years resulted in increase in ALP level and decrease in UA and serum phosphate. After 4.5 years, she developed lumbago and right ankle pain. Blood tests showed ALP of 1102 IU/ml, UA of 1.2 mg/dl, and serum phosphate of 0.8 mg/dl. Other laboratory tests demonstrated metabolic acidosis, aminoaciduria, low tubular reabsorption of phosphate (34.8 %; normal value 85–98 %), and high fractional excretion of uric acid (47.6 %; normal value 4–14 %). These results indicated generalized dysfunction of the proximal renal tubules. A technetium bone scan showed increased uptake in bilateral ribs, carpal bones, lumbar spine, and bilateral calcaneus. She was diagnosed with acquired Fanconi's syndrome with hypophosphatemic osteomalacia associated with ADV therapy. ADV was discontinued and replaced with entecavir (ETV) while hypophosphatemia was treated with oral phosphate. Three months after cessation of ADV and oral phosphate supplementation, the patient reported symptomatic improvement and blood tests showed normalization of phosphate level and low ALP level.

Case 10 was a 31-year-old man with HBeAg-positive liver cirrhosis. He was also first treated with LAM, and ADV was added on 16 months later. The laboratory data were within the normal ranges at baseline. Treatment for 1.5 year with ADV resulted in decrease in serum phosphate and UA, and 4-year treatment increased ALP level. After 7 years, the right metatarsal bone broke in an accident. After 9 years of treatment, blood tests showed serum phosphate of 1.3 mg/dl. Detailed clinical examination was conducted at that stage. Other laboratory tests showed aminoaciduria, low tubular reabsorption of phosphate (65.5 %), and high fractional excretion of uric acid (19.1 %). A technetium bone scan showed increased uptake in bilateral ribs, bilateral ankles, tarsal bones, and right metatarsal. He was also diagnosed with acquired Fanconi's syndrome and hypophosphatemic osteomalacia associated with ADV therapy. ADV dosing interval was changed from 10 mg every day to 10 mg every other day, and oral phosphate supplementation and calcitriol were added to the treatment. Treatment for 2 months resulted in improvement of symptoms and normalization of phosphate level.

Discussion

Renal impairment is one of the most serious adverse effects of ADV. The following mechanism is considered to explain ADV-induced nephrotoxicity: the human organic anion transporter-1 (hOAT1) is a renal membrane protein expressed at the basolateral membrane of the proximal tubule cells. hOAT1 can efficiently transport cyclic nucleoside phosphonate, and thus contribute to ADV nephrotoxicity by accumulation of the drug in renal proximal tubules [18, 19].

Previous studies indicated that the ADV-related nephrotoxicity is dose-dependent [12]. In a large-scale clinical trial, 8 % of patients treated with 30 mg/day ADV for 48 weeks had high serum creatinine ($\geq$0.5 mg/dl), relative to baseline. On the other hand, none of the patients treated with 10 mg/day ADV showed increase in creatinine ($\geq$0.5 mg/dl), relative to baseline [20]. Thus, ADV at a dose of 10 mg/day has been used previously for the treatment of patients with CHBI. However, renal dysfunction has been reported even after the use of ADV at this dose, especially after long-term administration [13–15]. For example, in a study of the 10 mg ADV combined with LAM, serum creatinine increased in 38 % of patients following median treatment duration of 38 months [14]. In another retrospective study of 687 patients, during a median treatment period of 27 months, 10.5 % of patients developed renal impairment, which was defined as a decrease in eGFR of more than 20 % relative to the baseline [15]. In our study, 9.6 % of patients developed renal impairment during a median treatment duration of 64.3 months. Our results also showed that 20.2 % of the patients exhibited more than 30 % decrease in eGFR, and a much larger proportion (43.2 %) of the patients showed more than 20 % decrease in eGFR. These rates are higher than those reported previously. Furthermore, as shown in

Fig. 2a, patients with rapid falls in eGFR within the first 2 years of treatment should be carefully monitored for any renal dysfunction. Based on the results of our study, it seems that longer dosing period is associated with higher incidence of renal dysfunction.

We also analyzed the risk factors of renal impairment defined by a decrease in eGFR to less than 50 ml/min/1.73 m^2. Ha et al. [13] reported that age >50 years, mild renal impairment at baseline, hypertension and/or diabetes mellitus, and male sex were significant predictors of renal impairment characterized by decrease in eGFR of ≥20 % relative to baseline. Furthermore, Yu et al. [15] also reported that age ≥50 years was a significant predictor of renal dysfunction in those patients treated with ADV. In our study, age was also identified as a significant and independent determinant of the primary endpoint, together with liver cirrhosis and history of arterial hypertension. Considered together, these data indicate that care should be taken when ADV-based therapy is used for elderly patients with CHBI.

Cross-sectional studies have demonstrated a decline in GFR with age [21, 22]. Moreover, hypertension and diabetes mellitus are also reported to worsen the rate of decline of renal function [23–25]. Renal failure is common and often severe in patients with cirrhosis due to the activation of various vasoconstrictor systems, including the renin–angiotensin system and the sympathetic nervous system [26]. Taken together, eGFR is more likely to decrease during ADV therapy in patients with older age, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cirrhosis, mild renal dysfunction at baseline.

ADV-induced proximal tubule failure can lead to hypophosphatemia. In a randomized clinical control trial using 120 mg/day ADV for treatment of patients with HIV, hypophosphatemia occurred in 50 % of patients after 48 weeks and in 61 % of patients after 72 weeks of ADV treatment [27]. On the other hand, in another study using 10 mg/day ADV for patients with CHBI, there was no overall change in serum phosphorus level during the 96-week study period [28]. However, in recent years, several reports have described the development of hypophosphatemia in patients treated with ADV at a daily dose of 10 mg [14, 29]. In our study, 27.1 % of patients developed hypophosphatemia during the combination therapy. Although 21.9 % of patients developed transient hypophosphatemia, 5.2 % of patients who had normal phosphate level at baseline developed persistent hypophosphatemia. In this regard, one previous study reported that approximately 2 % of hospitalized patients had hypophosphatemia [30]. Collectively, the above results and our findings indicate that ADV-based treatment is associated with a high incidence of hypophosphatemia. Tamori et al. [14] reported that serum phosphate level decreased to less than 2.5 mg/ml in 16.2 % of their patients during the 38-month combination therapy. Gara et al. [29] reported that 14 % of their patients treated with nucleotide analog therapy (10 mg/day ADV combined with 100 mg/day LAM, or 300 mg/day tenofovir monotherapy) developed persistent hypophosphatemia. Analysis of our data identified male sex, presence and/or history of HCC, and low serum phosphate level at baseline as significant determinants of hypophosphatemia. Furthermore, a decrease in eGFR by ≥30 % relative to baseline within 2.5 years was also associated with the development of hypophosphatemia.

Hepatic insufficiency is associated with impairment in 25-hydroxylation of vitamin D in the liver, which can lead to reduced synthesis of 1, 25 (OH) 2D3, with subsequent worsening of hypophosphatemia based on reduced intestinal absorption of phosphorus [31, 32]. In our study, 73 % of patients with HCC had liver cirrhosis, and the presence and/or history of HCC was a predictor of hypophosphatemia. Another mechanism of hypophosphatemia is protein and calorie malnutrition, which is a common feature of chronic liver disease. Furthermore, invasive treatment of HCC may itself cause hypophosphatemia. The present study also analyzed the relation between gender and hypophosphatemia. In a study that enrolled more than 4500 community-dwelling Italians of broadly diverse age, serum phosphorus levels were similar in males and females until the age of 45 years [33]. Interestingly, serum phosphate level increased in females aged between 45 and 54 years but fell after 55 years of age. The increase in serum phosphate level in females is probably related to menstrual status [33]. In the present study, serum phosphate level was higher in females than in males at baseline (3.51 vs. 3.18, $P < 0.0001$). Thus, male sex was a significant determinant of hypophosphatemia. These findings call for careful monitoring of serum phosphate level in patients treated with ADV, especially male patients, patients with HCC, and patients with renal dysfunction.

Several studies described the development of Fanconi's syndrome and subsequent hypophosphatemic osteomalacia in patients treated with 10 mg/day ADV [14, 16, 17]. Fanconi's syndrome is characterized by generalized transport defect in the proximal tubules, leading to renal losses of glucose, phosphate, uric acid, amino acids, bicarbonate, and other organic compounds [34]. Severe hypophosphatemia seems to cause inadequate mineralization of bone matrix, with subsequent osteomalacia [35, 36]. The electrolyte imbalance and osteomalacia cause symptoms of muscle weakness, fatigue, ostealgia, and bone fractures [37]. Acquired renal tubular defect resulting in Fanconi's syndrome have been described in association with many exogenous agents, including valproate, aminoglycosides, tetracycline, and acyclic nucleoside phosphonates [34].

Various approaches have been used for the treatment of osteomalacia associated with Fanconi's syndrome. Clarke et al. [38] reported successful treatment of osteomalacia associated with acquired Fanconi's syndrome with calcium, phosphate and vitamin D, regardless of the underlying cause of the disease. Eight cases of Fanconi's syndrome with ADV-related hypophosphatemic osteomalacia were reported in the past 5 years [14, 16, 17, 39–41]. Three of the 8 patients were treated with oral phosphate only; while 3 other patients received oral phosphate and vitamin D, and one patient was treated with the combination of oral phosphate, vitamin D and calcium. In all cases, treatment increased serum phosphate level and improved musculoskeletal symptoms. Similar to the eight cases reported in the literature, our 2 patients showed normalization of phosphate level and symptomatic improvement after treatment. Treatment with oral phosphate for ADV-related hypophosphatemic osteomalacia is considered effective.

We also examined the clinical characteristics of the 14 patients who developed persistent hypophosphatemia. Three of the 14 patients developed ostealgia during the treatment. Patients 1 and 10 were diagnosed with acquired Fanconi's syndrome with subsequent hypophosphatemic osteomalacia. Although we could not confirm the diagnosis of Fanconi's syndrome in patient 2 because she was transferred to another hospital, she was considered to have developed Fanconi's syndrome based on the clinical course. Despite persistent hypophosphatemia, serum creatinine remained within the normal range. In addition, 6 of the 14 patients also had low eGFR ($\geq$30 % decrease relative to baseline), and two patients with Fanconi's syndrome showed $\geq$40 % decrease in eGFR, relative to baseline. Based on the above features, patients can develop marked hypophosphatemia and serious complications, such as Fanconi's syndrome, following significant fall in eGFR, irrespective of the level of serum creatinine. In the three patients who developed Fanconi's syndrome, a gradual increase in serum ALP level and simultaneous fall in serum uric acid were noted more than one year before the appearance of ostealgia. Based on the above findings, we recommend reducing the dose or changing medications to other nucleotide analogues in patients who develop hypouricemia, hyper-ALPemia, hypophosphatemia, and low eGFR, to avoid the development of ADV-induced Fanconi's syndrome.

In our study, the dosing interval of ADV was modified by the attending physician following increase in serum creatinine level. Seventeen (5.8 %) patients required such modification, their eGFR and serum phosphate showed significant improvement at 6 and 12 months after the modification, in agreement with previous reports [13, 42]. However, the modification in ADV dosing interval from 10 mg every day to every other day neither affected HBV-DNA level nor the antiviral effect. Therefore, the ADV dose should be modified in patients who show decrease in eGFR and/or serum phosphate.

In conclusion, our results showed that even at low dose of 10 mg/day, long-term combination therapy of ADV and LAM can cause renal impairment and hypophosphatemia, and lead to Fanconi's syndrome in a subgroup of patients. ADV-based treatment tends to reduce eGFR and serum phosphate especially in elderly male patients and those with HCC. We recommend regular monitoring of serum phosphate and evaluation of eGFR, in addition to serum creatinine, in patients treated with ADV. Suspicion of Fanconi's syndrome requires early reduction of ADV dose or switching to other antiviral agents.

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Conflict of interest None.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE—LIVER, PANCREAS, AND BILIARY TRACT

Seroclearance rate of hepatitis B surface antigen in 2,112 patients with chronic hepatitis in Japan during long-term follow-up

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Abstract
Background Rate of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) seroclearance was determined in 2,112 Japanese patients with chronic hepatitis B who were followed up for at least 15 years.
Methods Patients had a median age of 37 years and included 1,431 (67.8 %) men. Median values were AST/ALT, 43/62 IU/L; platelet counts, 182 × 10^3/mm^3; HBsAg, 3,400 IU/mL; and hepatitis B virus (HBV) DNA, 6.2 log copies/mL. Factors influencing HBsAg seroclearance were evaluated by the Cox proportional model and annual rate of HBsAg seroclearance by the Kaplan–Meier life table method.
Results The overall annual rate of HBsAg seroclearance was 1.75 % in 2,112 patients; it was 1.65 % in 1,130 untreated and 2.05 % in 982 treated patients ($p = 0.289$). In untreated patients, seroclearance was influenced by age, no HBV infections in third-degree or closer relatives, and HBsAg levels in univariate analysis. Seroclearance was influenced by a median age ≥50 years [relative risk (RR) 1.61 ($p = 0.018$)] and HBsAg ≤2,000 IU/mL [RR 1.77 ($p = 0.014$)] in multivariate analysis. In treated patients, age, male gender, no HBV infections in third-degree or closer relatives, interferon therapy, chronic hepatitis, high AST and γ-GTP levels, low platelet counts, hepatitis B e antigen (HBeAg)-negative status, low HBsAg levels and the wild-type precore sequence significantly influenced HBsAg seroclearance. In multivariate analysis, no family history [RR 2.22 ($p = 0.006$)], interferon treatment [RR 3.15 ($p < 0.001$)], and HBeAg-negative status [RR 3.75 ($p < 0.001$)] significantly influenced HBsAg seroclearance.
Conclusions In this retrospective cohort study, the annual rate of HBsAg seroclearance was 1.65 % in untreated patients and 2.05 % in treated patients.

Keywords Seroclearance · Hepatitis B surface antigen · Hepatitis B virus · Chronic hepatitis B

Abbreviations

ALT	Alanine aminotransferase
AST	Aspartate aminotransferase
ETV	Entecavir
HBeAg	Hepatitis B e antigen
HBcrAg	Hepatitis B core-related antigen
HBV	Hepatitis B virus
HBV DNA	Hepatitis B virus DNA
HBsAg	Hepatitis B surface antigen
IFN	Interferon
LAM	Lamivudine

Introduction

Worldwide, an estimated 400 million people are infected with hepatitis B virus (HBV) persistently. HBV infection is a common disease that can induce a chronic carrier state

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and is associated with the risk of developing progressive disease and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) [1–5]. In regions highly endemic for HBV, such as Asia and Africa, the persistent carrier state is established by perinatal transmission or early in infancy. Carriers serve as the reservoir of HBV in the community and can spread the infection to susceptible individuals. The incidence of HCC is decreased extremely by eradicating HBV from the circulation that is responsible for liver damage [6–9]. In Japan, interferon (IFN) was introduced for the treatment of persistent HBV infections, and long-term IFN increased seroclearance of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) [10]. Since 2000, the effect of long-term nucleot(s)ide analogues, such as lamivudine [11, 12] and entecavir [13], on HBsAg seroclearance has been monitored in Japan.

In the current study, we followed untreated or treated patients for at least 15 years. We evaluated the seroclearance of HBsAg, achieved in both groups of patients, by using highly sensitive assays. Our aim was to determine factors that can lead to HBsAg seroclearance and to elucidate the factors associated with its success.

Patients and methods

Patients

During at least 15 years from 1968, 2,112 consecutive patients, chronically mono-infected with HBV (confirmed by HBsAg-positivity for at least 6 months) were followed at the Department of Hepatology, Toranomon Hospital, in Metropolitan Tokyo. Patients met the following inclusion and exclusion criteria: (1) negativity for hepatitis C antibody and/or hepatitis C virus RNA by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) in the serum; (2) no history of HCC; and (3) no history of autoimmune hepatitis, alcohol liver disease, hemochromatosis, or chronic liver disease other than chronic hepatitis B. Thus, the 2,112 patients were enrolled in this cohort study. A written informed consent was obtained from each patient. The study protocol conformed to the ethical guidelines of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki and was approved a priori by the institution's human research committee.

Treatment

Nine hundred and eighty-two patients received antiviral treatments. Of them, 156 patients received prednisolone (PSL) 40 mg daily for 1 week, 30 mg daily for 1 week, 20 mg daily for 1 week, and then 10 mg daily for 1 week until it was abruptly withdrawn (total 700 mg). A total of 428 patients received 100 mg lamivudine (LAM) daily as an initial therapy. In total, 333 patients received 3–12 MU of IFN-α or IFN-β. The durations and regimens of treatment were as follows: daily for 2 or 4 weeks and then 2 or 3 times per week for 26–104 weeks. The median duration of treatment was 26 weeks (range 4–981). There were 190 (57 %) patients who received multiple treatments of IFN.

LAM treatment was continued as a rule; median duration of LAM treatment was 75 months (55–102). LAM-resistant rtM204I/V mutants developed in 151 (35 %) of the 428 patients, and they were provided with adefovir dipivoxil (10 mg) added on LAM, as a rescue therapy. The remaining patients continued to receive LAM monotherapy. In addition, 65 patients received 0.5 mg entecavir (ETV) daily as an initial therapy. ETV treatment was continued as a rule, and median duration of ETV treatment was 45 months (1.0–104).

Markers of HBV infection

Serum HBsAg titers were determined annually using ARCHITECT HBsAg QT assay kits (Abbott Laboratories, Tokyo, Japan), which have a lower limit of detection of 0.05 IU/mL and an upper limit of detection of 250 IU/mL. To expand the upper limit from 250 to 125,000 IU/mL, serum samples going off the scale were diluted stepwise to 1:20 and 1:500 with ARCHITECT diluents following instructions from the manufacturer.

Hepatitis B e antigen (HBeAg) was determined by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay with a commercial kit (HBeAg EIA; Institute of Immunology, Tokyo, Japan). HBV DNA was quantified using the Amplicor monitor assay (Roche Diagnostics, Tokyo, Japan) with a dynamic range of 2.6–7.6 log copies/mL, or COBAS TaqMan HBV v.2.0 (Roche Diagnostics, Tokyo, Japan) with a dynamic range of 2.1–9.0 log copies/mL. Hepatitis B core-related antigen (HBcrAg) was determined by chemiluminescence enzyme immunoassay (CLEIA) with the HBcrAg assay kit (Fujirebio Inc., Tokyo, Japan). A commercial kit (HBV Genotype EIA; Institute of Immunology, Tokyo, Japan) was used to serologically determine HBV genotypes by the combination of epitopes expressed on the pre-S2 region product, which is specific for each of the 7 major genotypes (A–G).

Statistical analysis

Baseline data were obtained on the day of the first visit in untreated patients. In patients who received antivirals, baseline data were obtained at the start of the first day of treatment. Categorical data were compared between groups by chi-squared or Fisher's exact tests. Continuous variables with a nonparametric distribution were analyzed by Mann–Whitney *U* tests, whereas those with a parametric distribution were analyzed by the Student's *t* test. Cox

regression analyses were used to assess variables that were significantly associated with HBsAg seroclearance. All baseline factors that were found to be significantly associated with HBsAg seroclearance by univariate analysis were entered into a multivariate analysis. Independent baseline factors associated with the seroclearance of HBsAg were evaluated using a stepwise Cox regression analysis. We then performed a time-dependent Cox regression to analyze independent factors associated with HBsAg seroclearance while on-treatment factors and independent baseline factors had been adjusted.

Cumulative HBsAg seroclearance rates were analyzed using the Kaplan–Meier method; differences in the resulting curves were evaluated using log-rank tests. Significance was defined as $p < 0.05$ for all two-tailed tests. Data analysis was performed with the SPSS software package version 11.0.1 J (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Results

Baseline characteristics in the 2,112 patients

The baseline characteristics of studied patients are shown in Table 1. They had a median age of 37 years (range 1–81), included 1,431 (67.8 %) men, and 2,031 (96.2 %) of them had chronic hepatitis. Their baseline values were AST/ALT, 43 (3–2,192)/62 (2–3,020 IU/L); γ-GTP, 27 (4–1,494) IU/L; platelet counts, 182 (40–483) × 10^3/mm^3; and HBV markers were HBsAg, 3,400 (0.06–27,700) IU/mL; and HBV DNA, 6.2 (<2.1 to >9.1) log copies/mL. HBeAg was not detectable in 5.4 % of studied patients, and the distribution of genotypes A/B/C/others was 4.5:15.6:79.6:0.3 %.

The HBsAg seroclearance rate analyzed by the Kaplan–Meier method was 9 % in 5 years, 17 % in 10 years, 27 % in 15 years, 35 % in 20 years, 44 % in 25 years, and 54 % in 30 years. The annual rate of HBsAg seroclearance was 1.75 % during 20 years (Fig. 1).

In the 2,112 patients, factors influencing HBsAg seroclearance in univariate analysis by the Cox regression analyses were cirrhosis [relative risk (RR) 2.40 ($p = 0.014$)]; HBeAg negative [RR 3.01 ($p = 0.001$)]; and HBsAg ≤2,000 IU/mL [RR 2.13 ($p = 0.004$)]. In multivariate analyses, only 2 factors contributed to HBsAg seroclearance: HBeAg negative [RR 1.81 ($p < 0.001$)]; and HBsAg ≤2,000 IU/mL [RR 2.60 ($p < 0.001$)] (Table 2).

Untreated patients and treated patients

Differences in the baseline characteristics between 1,130 untreated and 982 treated patients are shown in Table 3: age [31 years vs. 36 ($p < 0.001$)]; male gender [62.4 vs. 71.9 % ($p < 0.001$)]; AST [median 27 vs. 56 IU/L ($p < 0.001$)]; ALT [median 28 vs. 96 IU/L ($p < 0.001$)]; γ-GTP [median 20 vs. 45 IU/L ($p < 0.001$)]; total bilirubin

Table 1 Baseline characteristics 2,112 patients infected with HBV followed for longer than 15 years

Features at the baseline	Patients (n = 2,112)
Demographic data	
Age (years)	37 (1–81)
Men	1,431 (67.8 %)
Liver disease	
Chronic hepatitis	2,031 (96.2 %)
Cirrhosis	81 (3.8 %)
Laboratory data	
AST (IU/L)	43 (3–2,192)
ALT (IU/L)	62 (2–3,020)
γ-GTP (IU/L)	27 (4–1,494)
Total bilirubin (mg/dL)	0.7 (0.1–21.2)
Albumin (g/dL)	4.3 (1.1–5.8)
Platelets (×10^3/mm^3)	182 (40–483)
α-Fetoprotein (μg/L)	4 (1–2,060)
HBV markers	
HBeAg-negative status	1,169 (55.4 %)
HBsAg (IU/mL)	3,400 (0.06–277,000)
HBcrAg (log U/mL)	5.4 (<3.0 to >6.8)
Genotypes (A/B/C/others)	4.5 %/15.6 %/79.6 %/0.3 %
HBV DNA (log copies/mL)	6.2 (<2.1 to >9.1)

Median values with the range in parentheses or numbers with the percentage in parentheses are given

HBV hepatitis B virus, *AST* aspartate aminotransferase, *ALT* alanine aminotransferase, *γ-GTP* γ-guanosine triphosphate, *HBeAg* hepatitis B e antigen, *HBsAg* hepatitis B surface antigen, *HBcrAg* hepatitis B core-related antigen

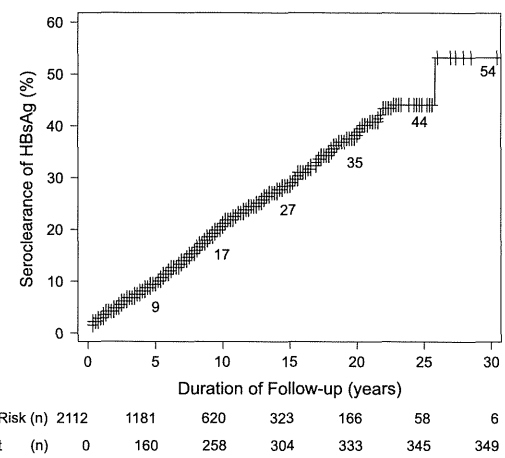

Fig. 1 Seroclearance of HBsAg in the 2,112 patients studied. Numbers of patients at risk and those of patients who lost HBsAg are indicated below each time point