

Analysis of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in Patients Co-infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
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HCV is a complicating infection in many HIV patients. Controversies regarding whether early treatment of HIV, HCV, or both simultaneously continue. Because HCV-RNA remains stable over time in the absence of immunodeficiency, clinical practice has been to employ watchful-waiting in the management of HCV.

Conversely, HIV+ patients have higher baseline HCV levels as compared to patients with only HCV. Moreover, HIV patients with HCV-RNA levels (bDNA assay) have significantly increased HCV loads over time. In this study,

we sequentially assessed HCV-RNA in co-infected patients using RT-PCR. **METHODS:** CD4 and HCV-RNA (Roche Monitor™) were measured in 41 HIV/HCV co-infected patients. Their clinical status was followed longitudinally. **RESULTS:** 41 patients were evaluated. All patients had detectable HCV RNA at baseline and at least two subsequent visits at least three months apart. Patients were stratified according to CD4 levels, and no significant difference in HCV-RNA was found among the various groups:

CONCLUSIONS: In this HIV population, HCV RNA levels remained stable over time. The peripheral CD4 counts do not correlate with HCV-RNA. We speculate that intrahepatic lymphocytes, and not peripheral CD4, modulate HCV replication and consequently, HCV-RNA levels.

