New Hepatitis B Test Shows Promise in Detecting Liver Cancer Earlier

Liver cancer development is strongly associated with hep B.

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A newly developed hepatitis B virus (HBV) test can be used to diagnose hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC, the most common form of liver cancer) earlier in the course of the disease. Unlike existing assays, this test can detect what is known as closed circular DNA (cccDNA) in serum, individuals cells and preserved tissue samples.

“The development of HCC is strongly associated with HBV,” the study’s lead investigator, Song-Mei Liu, MD, PhD, of the Center for Gene Diagnosis, Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, Wuhan, China, said in a press release. “Recently, several new antiviral strategies targeting cccDNA have been established to improve HBV clearance. It is of great clinical significance to provide an accurate and sensitive approach for cccDNA detection. With this method, more and more patients with chronic HBV will have precision treatment available to prevent or delay HCC occurrence, and HCC in patients could be diagnosed at an earlier stage,”

Publishing their findings in The Journal of Molecular Diagnostics, the researchers developed a new assay that relies on a highly sensitive technique known as droplet digital PCR (ddPCR). This test has a great advantage over other means of detecting liver cancer in that it is noninvasive—it does not require a biopsy.

The assay indicated that nearly 90 percent of 68 people with hep B and liver cancer tested positive for cccDNA compared with 53 percent of 79 people with hep B who did not have liver cancer.

The investigators concluded that the test correctly identified the presence of liver cancer 74.5 percent of the time and correctly indicated that an individual did not have liver cancer 93.7 percent of the time.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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