Hepatitis C Antibody Test

September 27, 2018 By Greg Jefferys

Every week I get one or two emails from very upset people who have completed their treatment, done their end of treatment test and gone back to see their doctor to be told that they still have Hep C.

Then they write to me very, very upset asking advice about what their options are now? What they can do next to get rid of the Hep C.

The first thing I ask is what test their doctor used to confirm that they had relapsed? That they still had Hep C?

Now it is a very strange fact that about 95% of these people who have been told that they have relapsed by their doctor have only had a Hep C antibody test. Based on that antibody test their doctors have told them that they still have Hep C.

And this is completely wrong!

Here is a part of the conversation thread of such an email I received this week:

Hi Greg,

I just received my end of treatment test results and I did not get cured from Hep c. Is there a stronger medicine I should order? Was 4 weeks after end of treatment too soon to get tested after I completed the medicine? Should I order a stronger dose?

Thanks

F####

Hi F###

Firstly, I am very surprised by this news and am concerned about what type of test you received… could you please tell me or maybe send me a copy of the test.

Sometimes the test is not the correct test and sometimes the result is not read correctly.

Best wishes

Greg

Hi Greg

Okay. That's good to know. My Doctor took a Liver panel and checked my levels. What test should I have her run? She just did a hepatic panel with my blood. I did not get a copy of the results but I

could ask for them. I took the blood test 4 weeks after I finished the medicine. And I'm wondering if I should do another round. My doctor said I should. What do you think? Do you have the stronger medicine the one with ribavirin?

Thanks F###

In this case F### got a copy of her test results from her doctor and sent them to me. I was amazed (and not) to see that the doctor had only ordered a Hepatitis C Antibody test. All that this test did was confirm that she had Hep C antibodies but this in no way indicated that she had relapsed. It was a meaningless result that cause enormous distress to F###.

What is worrying about the above case is that this is NOT a doctor in a third world country, this is a doctor in the USA. Indeed, there is no real difference between doctors in the USA, UK and other developed countries and doctors from third world countries as far as this regular incorrect diagnosis of Hep C status goes.

So let's get this cleared up now.

The Hep C antibody test does not confirm an infection with Hep C. If a person has not done Hepatitis C treatment the presence of Hep C antibodies means that there is a 75% chance that they have Hep C.
If a person has done treatment the results of a Hep C antibody test are completely meaningless because any person who has had Hep C will ALWAYS have Hep C antibodies.

So what are antibodies?

The dictionary definition of an antibody is: A blood protein produced in response to and counteracting a specific antigen. Antibodies combine chemically with substances which the body recognizes as alien, such as bacteria, viruses, and foreign substances in the blood with the purpose of neutralizing them.

So put simply Hep C antibodies are proteins made by your own immune system in an attempt to fight and destroy the Hep C virus. In about 25% of cases they actually win this battle and clear the virus.

But regardless of the outcome the Hep C antibodies will always be present in your blood.
So if you have had Hep C treatment then the Hep C antibody test is a waste of time and money. It means nothing.
The only tests that are of value are tests that test for the actual virus. These are commonly called viral load tests or RNA tests.

So if you want to know if you are cured of Hepatitis C or are infected with Hepatitis C then you must have a viral load test / RNA Test.

This blog originally appeared on Greg Jefferys' Hep C Treatment Home Page, and is republished with permission. Click here to read more of Greg's blog.

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