Liver Cancer and Hepatitis C

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Hepatitis C can lead to a variety of complications such as cirrhosis, portal hypertension, liver cancer, and liver transplant. Conditions such as cirrhosis are the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplants.

Risk Factors & What You Can Do
Having cirrhosis doesn't mean you will get cancer, but your risk is higher and it's important to be proactive with regular follow up testing.

Diagnosis and treatment for hepatitis C is key to eliminating the virus from causing further liver damage and complications.

Treatment
Treatment for hepatitis C has a high cure rate of 95% and over for the majority of hepatitis c genotypes (virus strains) and conditions.

The goal of treatment is to eliminate the virus and stop further liver damage from occurring. The liver has the ability to regenerate from mild damage and make new healthy liver tissue which helps liver function to improve. But if the liver is severely scarred (cirrhosis), the liver cannot regenerate from this level of damage.

Treatment for hepatitis C only cures and eliminates the virus, it cannot cure cirrhosis. It's important for the patient to continue to be monitored by a liver disease specialist (hepatologist or gastroenterologist). Ask your doctor about receiving regular tests like ultrasounds, blood work and other tests and exams every 6 months.

Testing
Ultrasounds, MRI's and special blood tests can tell if there are cysts, tumors and certain changes in liver function. Early detection means a better prognosis.

MD Anderson and the Mayo Clinic are leading hospitals specializing in liver cancer. MD Anderson states, "Chronic hepatitis C also increases the risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma as well as some head and neck cancers.

Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine against hepatitis C, and there are few if any symptoms, says Harry Torres, M.D., associate professor of Infectious Diseases. "It's a silent infection," he says. "And it's a very clever virus that mutates very fast, so it has been difficult to

develop a vaccine."

"Knowing the risk factors and getting screened are your best defenses against cancers caused by hepatitis C. Treatment for hepatitis C can reduce your risk of liver cancer by 75%."

George Wu, MD, Ph.D., a professor of medicine and chief of hepatology at the University of Connecticut Medical Center in Farmington states important facts about liver cancer,

"It usually occurs when the liver is damaged over an extended period of time. When liver cells are damaged and die due to chronic disease of the liver, fibrous scar tissue can be deposited in place of the missing cells. Normal cells can become cancer cells when they've been extensively damaged.

Cirrhosis increases the risk of developing liver cancer by at least 40 times over the risk of an average person. Of all people with cirrhosis, 3 percent will develop liver cancer every year. So, it's not surprising that 70 to 90 percent of all cases of liver cancer in the United States occur in livers that are cirrhotic."

Be proactive. Regular testing and early detection are key to a good prognosis.

Have you discussed the condition of your liver with your doctor?

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