Understanding Hepatitis C Genotypes

June 5, 2018 By Greg Jefferys

The Short Story

Hepatitis C genotypes are like different races, or breeds, of the Hepatitis C virus. Like different types of dogs, they have similar features but some minor differences.

These differences mean that they affect us slightly differently and also respond differently to treatment.

There are 11 different Hepatitis C genotypes but in most countries the first three genotypes represent the bulk of infections. These are genotypes G1, G2 and G3. Of these three HCV genotypes its is genotype 3 that is the most difficult to cure. Genotype 3 also does the most damage to the liver.

About 10% of people infected with Hepatitis C are infected with more than one genotype of Hep C.

The Long Story

The History the Hepatitis C virus

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is an infectious pathogen that causes damage to the liver. HCV was first discovered in 1989 it was simply known as non-A and non-B Hepatitis. It is the most common cause of chronic liver disease ending in liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. Globally, it is a significant cause of death and morbidity affecting about 180 million individuals around the the world, in every nation.

Hepatitis C virus is a family of viruses, similar enough to be called Hepatitis C virus, yet different enough to be classified into subgroups, or “breeds”. We call these Hep C genotypes.

You might like to think of them as different breeds of dogs.

The Hepatitis C virus is so small it can only be measured in nanometres, one virus particle is about one fifty billionth of a metre (0.000000001 m).

Consequently, because the virus can not actually be seen, a better way to understand the terms HCV ‘genotypes’ and ‘subtypes’ is to compare them to things that we can more readily relate to.

Click here to read the rest of Greg’s blog about hep C genotypes.

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