

Acute psychosis after therapy with Peginterferon alpha 2a (Pegaferon) in chronic Hepatitis C

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ABSTRACT

Exacerbation of psychotic symptoms during HCV treatment with interferon alpha has been reported. We present a case with psychiatric complication after therapy with Peginterferon.

KEY WORDS: Acute Psychosis, Hepatitis-C, Peginterferon.

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INTRODUCTION

Hepatitis C (HCV) infection in an emerging disease and the most risk factor is intravenous drug abusing.¹ Pegylated interferon plus ribavirin is the first choice in therapy of HCV infection² There is a considerable neuropsychiatric complication of interferon alpha treatment, as consequences of therapeutic cytokine release.³ Depression and suicide attempt, personality disorders, impaired cognition and less frequently, psychosis, delirium and rarely mania have all been reported.⁴ Consultation with a psychiatrist and control of depression in the patients can allow to continue the drugs to the patient under observation. However, severe psychiatric complications represent the important reason for discontinuation of interferon alpha.⁵

CASE REPORT

A 51-year-old man was diagnosed to be HCV infected in screening for control of addiction three

years ago. He had history of Intravenous Drug Use (IDUs) for the past about 10 years and many sexual contacts with promiscuous women. He was a heavy smoker. He denied alcohol use and from 6 months before he was free of addiction with methadone-supported Protocol. Evaluation of the patient showed: Normal abdominal ultrasonography, WBC 6200, Hgb 15.9 g/dl, Platelet 207,000 /cumm, Albumin level 3.7 g/dl, ALT 84 IU/ml, AST 70 IU/ml, normal thyroid function tests, HBs Ag negative, HIV Ab negative, HCV Ab Eliza positive, HCV RNA viral load 1,060,000 IU/ml by AMPLICOR HCV monitor Test, V 2.0 and Genotype 1b.

Liver biopsy; chronic hepatitis with grade 5 and stage 2 in Knodel scoring. Psychiatric consultation before start of therapy showed mild anxiety with depression which did not need medication. We started the Peginterferon alpha 2a (PEGAFERON®, Pooyesh Darou, Iran) 180 micg once a week plus oral treatment with ribavirin (RIBACIP®, Cipla Ltd., India) 10-15mg/kg per day. After three weeks the patient was admitted to the hospital because of insomnia, auditory hallucinations, delusional ideas of persecution, and psychomotor agitation. He did not have any insight about the environment and he said that he was a hepatologist and he could help me. The patient was treated with haloperidol and brought under control after 10 days.

DISCUSSION

It is not the first or the last report of psychiatric complication of interferon therapy in chronic hepatitis C and everybody should pay more attention to

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them. Exacerbation of psychotic symptoms during HCV treatment with interferon alpha has been reported.⁶ Former or current drug abuse and mental disorders are considered risk factors for occurrence of these complications.⁷ It is recommended to have at least three outpatients visit for psychiatric evaluation and preparing the patients before the start of therapy.⁵ Most patients with drug addiction had a psychiatric comorbidity and they need more attention.⁵ Current or previous psychosis is still considered as a contraindication for antiviral treatment with interferon alpha.⁸

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