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New insights in the diagnosis and monitoring of HCV infection

Several direct antiviral agents (DAAs) for the treatment of chronic hepatitis due to the hepatitis C virus (HCV) have been recently approved. Since these drugs allow to achieve a sustained response rate >95%, there is an enhanced need for the implementation of screening strategies aimed to the identification of “silent” HCV carriers in order to obtain a clearer picture on the real burden of infection and to plan for therapeutic interventions. While more than 65% of cases of chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma are linked to a chronic HCV infection, the modes of acquisition over time and the routes of infection show profound differences. Incidence data, when available, show a decrease over the last decades; prevalence data are not reliable since most studies have been carried out several years ago and in small population samples. Surveillance systems are mostly based on the reporting of symptomatic cases and rely on the detection of anti-HCV antibodies alone or on the combination of anti-HCV and HCV-RNA. Since the rate of active infections among anti-HCV positive, asymptomatic subjects ranges from 60% to 80% and usually decreases with age, the former strategy will overestimate the number of HCV-infected individuals and also underestimate the total number of subjects who encountered HCV, because a spontaneous clearance of HCV followed by the negativization of anti-HCV has been reported. Several screening algorithms that include HCVAg testing have been proposed; the sensitivity of current assays corresponds to about 1000 UI/mL of HCV-RNA, a level usually attained in untreated subjects.

Biography

Claudio Galli was graduated in Medicine at the Sapienza University in Roma, Italy in 1980, then specialized in Gastrointestinal Diseases and completed his PhD in Infectious Diseases at the same institution. He is the Associate Medical Director for Europe at Abbott Diagnostics, one of the largest companies in this sector. He has published 62 papers on indexed journals with a major focus on viral hepatitis and HIV infection and is a Reviewer for several high impact medical journals. He is an active Member of several Italian and international scientific societies and since 2005 he is recognized in Who's Who of professionals.

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