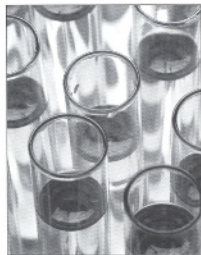


Children with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Infection

Experience from the team at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Conclusion

Fortunately chronic HCV is rare in children but for those who are infected there are difficult choices to be made. The infection is likely to be mild for the first few years but in a very few patients the disease may be more damaging. To accurately determine whether a child has mild or more severe disease a liver biopsy is needed and many doctors recommend that this procedure be undertaken in the first instance. If the biopsy shows disease that is advancing then most doctors would recommend trying a course of treatment. If the disease is mild it may be better to wait for more information and new drugs that may provide more treatment options. As is the case for so many viral diseases much more research is needed in children to allow us to provide accurate information to patients and their families so that they can make the right decisions for their children. In the meantime families should be comforted by the knowledge that over the last few years we have made enormous strides in our understanding of chronic HCV and the success of treatment has increased from 20% (with interferon on its own) to 60% (with pegylated interferon plus ribavirin). We look forward to further advances over the next few years.



Hepatitis C is a virus which may cause mild liver disease in children with a chance that more serious disease may develop in adult life. Most children and young people feel normal and grow normally, but some may feel tired or lacking in energy and some young adults may develop significant psychological effect.

So What Should We Do?

Approximately 30% of children will clear the infection naturally and so it is important to have annual checks of the liver. Talking to specialist doctors and nurses is also important, as they will have up to date information about treatment.

As part of this project, Jaswant Sira and Catherine Arkeley are working together to produce a series of leaflets for families

and young people all about hepatitis C. There is a piece about this in this issue of Delivery.

Professor Kelly, with dedicated hepatitis nurse support at Birmingham Children's Hospital, has over 10 years experience in the care and management of children and young people with hepatitis C. The team have also had a pivotal role in studies looking at treatment of hepatitis C in children. Early results of collaborative studies with regard to treatment for hepatitis C in children is very encouraging particularly in children with genotype 2 and 3. It is important that treatment is evaluated with proper clinical trials.

We hope to have an article in the next issue of Delivery about the care and management of children with hepatitis C.

World First for King's Liver Team

Doctors at King's College Hospital in London have made two major breakthroughs in liver research that have the potential to transform liver transplantation.

The team, based at the Hospital's Institute of Liver Studies, have carried out pioneering hepatocyte (liver cell) transplants on three babies, one of which was a life saving procedure.

This ground breaking technique, which was developed with funding from the Children's Liver Disease Foundation and the Community Fund (National Lottery), involves taking healthy cells from donor livers and injecting them directly into the livers of patients. The patient's liver cells then regenerate and eventually the dysfunctional liver cells are replaced with new healthy ones.

The team at King's also claims a world first in the exclusive use of frozen cells for the correction of a rare congenital clotting

disorder. Freezing cells gives the potential for the development of a 'Cell Bank', for stockpiling cells for use as and when they are needed. These breakthroughs have enormous implications for the future of liver transplantation and for the increase in the number of patients that can be treated.

Catherine Arkeley said: "We are absolutely delighted that we have been able to champion this project and see it come to fruition. Thanks must go to our Trustees, who had the vision to see the potential of the project, as we know that without our backing it could not have taken place. This pioneering research is just the sort of work that we would expect from this innovative and world-leading team. Congratulations to the many people involved."