Abstract

Objective. To report the prevalence of antibodies against the hepatitis C virus (anti-HCV) in a group of patients with hepatic cirrhosis (HC). Material and Methods. A prospective transversal and descriptive study was carried out from March 1998 to May 1999. Study subjects were 153 patients; 117 (76%) male and 36 (24%) female, diagnosed with HC. They were attended at the General Hospital Agustín O Horan and at Regional Research Center Doctor Hideyo Noguchi, in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. A clinical-epidemiologic questionnaire completed by interview was used for data collection. Anti-HCV were detected using a 2nd generation enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA-2). To confirm diagnosis, a second generation recombinant immunoblot assay (RIBA-2) was used. Hepatitis B surface antigen (HbsAg) and antibodies against the hepatitis B core antigen (anti-HBc) were determined using ELISA. The presence of anti-HCV was related to the epidemiologic variables of study subjects. The prevalence of anti-HCV was obtained and the frequency of the characteristics obtained by interview were compared among the positive and negative patients through the c2 test and the Fishers exact test, as needed. Results. Among patients with HC (35/117 (30%) male and 14/36 (39%) female), 32% were positive to anti-HCV. Alcoholism was present in all seroreactive males and absent in all positive females (p< 0.001). Data obtained through an interview were not associated with seropositivity. Anti-HBc was found in 16% of patients positive to anti-HCV and in 12% of seronegatives (p=0.69). Conclusions. The prevalence found was greater than previous reports in the general population in the Yucatan Peninsula (1.3%). The high prevalence of anti-HCV in these patients suggests that HC is more frequently associated with HCV in Yucatan, Mexico than hepatitis B. Alcoholism probably acts as a cofactor for the development of HC in males.

Keywords

hepatitis C virus; hepatitis B virus; liver cirrhosis; carcinoma hepatocellular; Mexico