

Conference Reports

Infectious Diseases in Injection Drug Users: Hepatitis C – An interdisciplinary Challenge

Hamburg, October 10th and 11th, 2003

In the last decade, infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) has emerged from the vague "non-A non-B hepatitis" to a more precisely characterized disease. Infection with the HCV has been shown to be a major cause of chronic hepatitis and hepatic fibrosis that progresses in some patients to cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. Treatment success increased dramatically with the introduction of pegylated interferon and ribavirin combination therapy, which leads to sustained viral response rates of 45% and 90% depending on the viral genotype. Whilst numbers of persons with chronic HCV-infection in the general population in industrialized nations range from 1% and 3%, the corresponding range of infection in different subgroups of IDUs is 40% and 90%. Treatment of chronic HCV-infection is often restricted to non drug using populations, based on concerns about poor adherence, high re-infection rates and complicated side-effects in injecting drug users (IDUs). However, the exclusion of specific patient groups from medically indicated therapies raises the question of discrimination. There is abundant evidence that adherence rates in IDUs may be as high as in non-IDU populations, provided treatment is conducted in a specialized setting. The first treatment studies in IDUs showed, that, under specific conditions, the treatment of chronic HCV-infection is both safe and efficient. However, treatment guidelines in the European Union countries as to treatment of HCV in IDUs are contradictory and treatment access is low. To remove these limitations, the German Competence Network on Hepatitis, the German Society of Addiction Medicine, the German Working Group of Physicians in the Treatment of HIV-infected and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Addiction Research of the University of Hamburg invited national and international experts in the area

of HCV-treatment to the Workshop "Infectious Diseases in Injection Drug Users, Hepatitis C – An interdisciplinary Challenge", which was held October 10th and 11th, 2003 at the University of Hamburg. The aim of this workshop was to discuss the magnitude of the problem in terms of epidemiology and economy, to understand the impact of infection on cerebral and hepatologic functioning and its consequences, and to clarify treatment approaches with special respect to IDUs. As treatment guidelines play a crucial role in provision of treatment, this workshop also served as an expert forum for the development of adequate guidelines.

The following pages include the abstracts of presentations held on the workshop. Selected presentations can be found on <http://www.zis-hamburg.de>. A more detailed review of the workshop will be published in one of the upcoming issues of *Suchttherapie*. On behalf of the German Competence Network on Hepatitis, the German Society of Addiction Medicine, the German Working Group of Physicians in the Treatment of HIV-infected and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Addiction Research, we thank Brian Edlin (New York), Daniel Forton (London), Ali Judd (London), Tillman Gerlach (Munich), Jörg Götz (Berlin), Doris Radun (Berlin), Siegbert Rossol (Russelsheim), Hans-Ulrich Wittchen (Dresden), Martina Sterneck (Hamburg), Diana Sylvestre (San Francisco), Heiner Wedemeyer (Hanover), Martin Schäfer (Berlin) and Reinhardt Zachoval (Munich) for helping to make this workshop a success.

Jens Reimer (Hamburg)
Markus Backmund (Munich)

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