QUESTION 15

In patients with untreated post-transfusion hepatitis C, the lifetime risk of progression to cirrhosis best approximates:

A. 1%
B. 5%
C. 20%
D. 50%
E. 80%

HEPATITIS C

- Acute and chronic hepatitis
- Acute usually asymptomatic or mild symptoms for few weeks
- 60 – 80% develop chronic hepatitis
- 30% of those with chronic hepatitis will progress to cirrhosis over 20 to 30 years
- Therefore 30% of the 80% of patients with hepatitis C develop cirrhosis = 24%

Answer = C

ACUTE HEPATITIS C

- Most asymptomatic
- Jaundice in < 25%
- Malaise, nausea, RUQ pain
- Symptoms (if present) can last 2 to 12 weeks
- Fulminant hepatic failure rare but more likely if also infected with hepatitis B

CHRONIC HEPATITIS C

- Spontaneous clearance of virus after it has persisted for 6/12 is uncommon
- Children more likely to clear virus
- Most patients asymptomatic or mild non-specific symptoms – fatigue, nausea, anorexia, myalgia, arthralgia, weakness, weight loss
- Severity of symptoms do not correlate with disease activity
- ALT and AST levels are variable, may be normal, usually only mildly elevated
- Cirrhosis suggested by elevated bilirubin, hypoalbuminaemia, low platelets

Hepatic Complications

- Hepatic decompensation (risk is 4% per yr in pts w cirrhosis)
  - Ascites
  - Variceal bleeding
  - Encephalopathy
  - Jaundice
- Survival after diagnosis of decompensated liver disease estimated at 50% at five years
Hepatocellular carcinoma (up to 3% per year in pts with cirrhosis)
- Cirrhosis is major risk factor
- Uncommon in hep C pts without cirrhosis (cf. hepatitis B)
- Most deaths due to decompensation rather than HCC

Survival

Factors Predictive of Progression

- Younger age of HCV infection → increased risk
- Children → decreased risk
- Host immune response
- HIV co-infection
- Infection from blood transfusion → ?increased risk
- Marijuana use → increased risk
- Higher BMI → steatosis/fibrosis → increased risk
- Alcohol → increased risk
- Ethnic background
- Viral diversity

- Best clinical predictor of disease progression is liver biopsy – amount of inflammation and fibrosis
- Mild inflammation, no fibrosis = 1.2% annual risk of progression to cirrhosis
- Moderate inflammation = 4.6% annual risk, 90% cirrhosis by 20 years
- Severe inflammation and fibrosis = nearly all develop cirrhosis by 10 years
Extrahepatic Manifestations of Chronic Hepatitis C

- Haematological diseases (eg: essential mixed cryoglobulinaemia, lymphoma)
- Renal disease (eg: membranoproliferative GN)
- Autoimmune disorders (eg: thyroiditis, autoantibodies)
- Dermatological conditions (eg: porphyria, lichen planus)
- Diabetes mellitus