

S U M M A R Y

HBV and HCV markers were tested in 3 groups (A,B and C) of patients in the Cancer Hospital Maharagama. Group A (24 patients) and B (15 patients) had received chemotherapeutic agents, while in group C (18 patients), chemotherapy had not been initiated at the time the serum sample was collected. Group A gave a history of developing jaundice while on chemotherapy while group B did not.

One serum sample was collected from all patients and six tests performed on each sample:-(I) HBsAg antigen by Reverse Passive Haemagglutination (RPHA) ;(II) HBsAg antigen by Radio Immuno Assay (RIA);(III) Anti-HBs by RIA;(IV) HBe antigen by RPHA;(V) Anti-HBc by competitive Enzyme Immuno Assay (EIA); and(VI) Anti-HCV by Particle Agglutination (PA).

The proportion of HBV markers was significantly higher in group A (79%) in comparison with group C(11%)($P < 0.001$); in group A in comparison with group B(40%)($P < 0.01$); and in groups A and B together in comparison with group C ($P < 0.01$). Group A had a preponderance of patients with Acute Lymphatic Leukaemia (ALL). ALL patients in both group A and B had significantly higher proportion of HBV markers in comparison with patients with other cancers in these two groups ($P < 0.05$).

The proportion of HBsAg in the three groups were A-(42%), B-(27%) and C-(6%). HBeAg was detected only among 4 of 10 groups A and one of 4 group B patients who were HBsAg positive.

Anti-HCV too was detected only in Group A and B patients and in those who had over 5 transfusions of blood or blood products.

The study showed clear evidence that HBV was being transmitted at an alarming rate among cancer patient on chemotherapy especially patients with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. It was also suggestive that HCV was being transmitted too.

The screening procedure for blood given to cancer patients is obviously inadequate and it is recommended that such blood should be screened for HBV by RIA.

Testing of surrogate markers (anti-HBc and serum alanine amino transferase) is recommended to reduce the risk of HCV transmission. Initial and periodic testing of Cancer patient for HBV markers (HBsAg and anti-HBc) is recommended. Also the strict adherence to universal precaution at the Cancer Hospital Maharagama.