

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS C RECEIVING INTERFERON-ALPHA THERAPY

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The existing studies point to a prevalence of clinical significant symptoms of depression and anxiety in chronic hepatitis C (CHC) patients are only scarcely investigated.

The present study aims to determine the frequency with which depression and anxiety occur in patients with CHC after receiving interferon-alpha therapy. The clinical and social implications are severe and the concurrent psychiatric disorders may lead to increased morbidity and impaired quality of life.

We searched for some socio-demographic and medical variables and we followed the relationship between depression and age, disease duration and duration of treatment.

We studied two groups of patients: a group of 40 patients diagnosed with CHC during interferon-alpha therapy for up to 6 months and a control group of 40 patients, newly diagnosed with CHC. We applied the Beck Depression Inventory to assess depression, and State Trait Anxiety Inventory to assess anxiety.

In contrast to the untreated reference group, we found significantly increased scores for depression ($p < .001$) and anxiety ($p < .001$) during interferon-alpha therapy in the treatment group. In both groups we found higher levels of anxiety than average, suggesting that this is a greater extent associated with CHC.

The treatment of co-morbid depression should follow the usual clinical guidelines and in case of major depression, or when clinically significant anxiety is present, a pharmacological approach should be made.

Based on these results, we conclude that screening for depression and anxiety should be carried out routinely as part of quality of care improvement in CHC individuals.