Prevalence and clinical presentations of hepatitis C virus among patients admitted to the rheumatology ward

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Abstract
To study the prevalence of anti-HCV antibodies among patients admitted to the rheumatology department, Cairo University hospitals, in 6-month period as well as to determine whether chronic HCV infection was the primary cause of their admission or just a concomitant association with the rheumatic disease. One hundred and fifty-seven patients were included in this study. They represent all patients admitted to the rheumatology inpatient department of Cairo University hospitals during the study period. Preset questionnaire including detailed demographic data, cause of admission and clinical manifestations of their disease was obtained for every patient. All patients were screened for HCV antibodies using ELISA technique. Other laboratory and imaging investigations were done according to the patient’s diagnosis. Twenty-nine patients (18.5%) were positive for HCV antibody. Eleven patients of them (38%) were admitted due to rheumatic manifestations directly related to chronic HCV infection, which represent 7% of all admitted patients (11/157). HCV antibodies were found in 17.6% and 6.7% among patients with rheumatoid and systemic lupus erythematosus. Arthritis, palpable purpura, digital gangrene and mononeuritis multiplex were the most common causes of admission related to chronic HCV infection. HCV antibodies were found in 18.5% among admitted patients to the rheumatology ward. The rheumatic manifestations of chronic HCV represent the primary cause of admission in 7% of all admitted patients. HCV screening should be included in the routine investigations for patients presenting to rheumatology departments in countries with high prevalence of chronic HCV infection.