Cessation of Nucleos(t)ide Analogue treatment after HBeAg seroconversion is associated with a 4-fold increased risk of relapse in cirrhotic compared to non-cirrhotic patients

Stijn Van Hees1,2, Stefan Bourgeois1,3, Hans Van Vlierberghe4, Thomas Sersté5, Sven Francque1,2, Peter P. Michielsen1,2, Sprengers Dirk2, Hendrik Reynaert2, Jean Henrion8, Sergio Negrin Dastis6, Jean Delwaide10, Luc Lasser1,1, Jochen Decaestecker1,2, Hans Orlent1, Filip Jaansen1,2, Geert Robaey1,1,6, Isabelle Colle1, Peter Starkel8, Christophe Moreno7, Frederik Nevens8,2, Thomas Vanwolleghem1,2, 1Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Antwerp University Hospital, Antwerp, Belgium; 2Laboratory of Experimental Medicine and Pediatrics, Antwerp University, Antwerp, Belgium; 3Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, ZNA Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium; 4Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Ghent University Hospital, Ghent, Belgium; 5Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Saint-Pierre University Hospital, Brussels, Belgium; 6Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, GZA Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium; 7Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, VUB University Hospital Brussels, Brussels, Belgium; 8Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Hôpital de Jolimont, Jolimont, Belgium; 9Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Grand Hôpital de Charleroi, Charleroi, Belgium; 10Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, CHU de Liège, Liège, Belgium; 11Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, CHU Brugmann Brussels, Brussels, Belgium; 12Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, AZ Delta, Roeselare, Belgium; 13Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, AZ Sint-Jan, Brugge, Belgium; 14Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Jessa Hospital, Hasselt, Belgium; 15Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Ziekenhuis Oost-Limburg, Genk, Belgium; 16Department of Medicine and Life sciences, Hasselt University, Hasselt, Belgium; 17Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, ASZ Aalst, Aalst, Belgium; 18Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Cliniques Universitaires Saint-Luc, Brussels, Belgium; 19Department of Gastroenterology, Hepatopancreatology and Digestive Oncology, CUB Hôpital Erasme, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium; 20Department of Gastroenterology, University Hospitals KULeuven, Leuven, Belgium

Background: Cessation of Nucleos(t)ide Analogue (NA) therapy after HBeAg seroconversion is associated with high relapse rates. Factors predictive for relapse in Caucasian patients are not well known. We investigated relapse rates and factors predictive for relapse after NA stop in a large multicenter cohort of HBeAg positive Chronic Hepatitis B (CHB) patients. Methods: This is a multicenter, pooled analysis of non-immun-suppressed HBeAg-positive, mono-infected CHB patients treated with different NA for >3 months. Data were collected between 1998 and 2017. Virologic relapse was defined as HBV DNA >2000 IU/ml; biochemical relapse as ALT >2xULN (with ULN=40 IU/ml). Metavir score was histologically graded at start of treatment. Cox regression model was used to identify predictive factors for HBeAg seroconversion on treatment and relapse after treatment stop. Follow-up time was calculated as respectively time from treatment start to HBeAg seroconversion or last follow-up and time from HBeAg seroconversion to relapse or last follow-up. Results: A total of 356 patients (75.3% male; 63% Caucasian; 16% African) were included; 115 (32%) of whom showed HBeAg seroconversion after a median treatment time of 17.7 months. Rapid, persistent HBV DNA suppression was predictive for HBeAg seroconversion (HR 0.955; p=0.001 per month increment) when results were adjusted for the presence of cirrhosis, HBV DNA and ALT levels at start of treatment in a multivariate Cox regression model. Treatment was stopped in 70 patients (of whom 11 were cirrhotic at baseline) after HBeAg seroconversion and a subsequent median consolidation therapy of 6.8 months. The median follow-up duration after treatment stop was 3.0 years during which 30 patients (43%) showed relapse (8 solely virologic, 14 combined biochemical and virologic), necessitating retreatment in 22 cases. HBeAg seroconversion was observed in 6/30 (20%) relapsed patients. Multivariate Cox regression model showed that the presence of cirrhosis (HR 4.350; p=0.027) at start of treatment predicted relapse after NA stop when results were adjusted for ethnicity and age at NA stop. In addition, relapse after NA stop was accompanied by liver-related death in 12 patients. Conclusion: In a predominantly Caucasian population, treatment cessation after HBeAg seroconversion led to relapse in 43% of the patients within a median follow-up duration of 3.0 years. Presence of cirrhosis at start of treatment was associated with a 4-fold increased risk of relapse after treatment stop. Two relapsed patients showed severe clinical events leading to liver-related death.

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Regulation of antiviral CD8 T cell response by MMP mediated soluble CD100 releasing in HBV infection

Shaqiang Yang, Lu Wang, Dongliang Yang, Jia Liu; Department of Infectious Disease, Institute of Infection and Immunity, Union Hospital, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

CD100 is the first semaphorin described to have immune functions and serves important roles in T cell responses. Proteolytic cleavage of CD100 from the cell surface by matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) gives rise to a soluble fragment of CD100 (sCD100), which is also thought to have immunoregulatory properties. In this study, we characterized the expression and the possible role of CD100/sCD100 in regulating antiviral response during HBV infection in patients and HBV-replicating mouse model. We found that surface CD100 expression on T cells of chronic Hepatitis B (CHB) patients was significantly increased compared to that of healthy controls (HC). Meanwhile, CHB patients showed significantly lower concentrations of serum sCD100 than HC. Correspondingly, decreased surface CD100 expression on T cells in PBMCs and elevated serum sCD100 levels were