

Hepatitis C Diagnosis, Management, and Treatment by Family Physicians: A survey of active members of the American Academy of Family Physicians

Purpose: Many people with hepatitis C receive all or most of their care from primary care physicians, yet little information exists about the knowledge, practice patterns, and beliefs of primary care physicians about hepatitis C.

Methods: A random sample mail survey of active members of the American Academy of Family Physicians in 2003.

Results: 1200 surveys were mailed with 634 returned (53% response rate) and 619 included in the analysis. Nearly all respondents (94%) had at least one patient with hepatitis C in their practice. Two thirds of respondents (66%) had diagnosed at least one new case of hepatitis C in the past year. Three quarters of respondents (77%) reported that hepatitis C is an important societal problem. Nearly all respondents (85%) correctly identified the most common risk factors for hepatitis C. However, only two thirds (63%) reported asking patients about hepatitis C risk factors. Most respondents (74%) prefer to involve specialists in the care of hepatitis C patients, although half of respondents (50%) reported experiencing barriers when referring hepatitis C patients. A small number (7%) of respondents have given antivirals. Most respondents think family physicians should be involved in the screening (94%), diagnosis (98%), and general care (69%) of hepatitis C patients. Respondents were less certain about family physicians' role in providing drug therapy.

Conclusions: Family physicians care for many patients with hepatitis C, and play an important role in the screening and diagnosis of hepatitis C. However, barriers to specialty care are an important problem.