

## POSTER ABSTRACTS

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### Infectious Disease

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#### Characteristics of Patients Diagnosed with Hepatitis C at an HMO

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**Background:** This paper describes the characteristics of patients receiving a diagnosis of hepatitis C (HCV) in an HMO.

**Method:** The population base is drawn from HealthPartners Medical Group in Minnesota, with approximately 250,000 enrollees. Possible HCV cases were identified from the administrative database, 1994-2001, and validated by chart audit (N = 323).

**Results:** More than two-thirds of the patients were men; about two-thirds of the patients were age 40-59. Nearly half have documented drug abuse; about a third have a record of alcoholism. Patient history of depression and other mental health problems prior to HCV treatment appears to be high. Our data show a substantial increase in diagnosis of HCV over time—70% of the cases in this population were diagnosed after 1998—when new therapy offered substantially better treatment outcomes. Three-quarters of the patients were referred to specialists. About 27% (86 patients) were treated for HCV. About three-quarters of these received combination treatment—interferon+ribavirin. A fifth of patients did not complete their treatment and about two-fifths were treated but non-responsive to therapy. Almost no demographic characteristics or risk factors were associated with probability of referral—with only one exception: patients with history of liver problems were more likely to be referred to a specialist. In general, most risk factors were not associated with probability of treatment—including alcoholism and drug use.

**Conclusions:** A large percentage of the cohort had documented alcohol and/or drug abuse problems—attributes that complicate treatment. Depression is considered a potential side effect of treatment, however, from these descriptive data, these patients had a history of a mental health condition or depression prior to treatment. The number of patients treated is relatively low—only about a quarter of patients with a confirmed diagnosis. There does not appear to be a strong association between risk factors and treatment.