

CHRONIC VIRAL HEPATITIS

CLINICAL GASTROENTEROLOGY

George Y. Wu, SERIES EDITOR

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CHRONIC VIRAL HEPATITIS

DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPEUTICS

Edited by

RAYMOND S. KOFF, MD

*University of Massachusetts Medical School,
Worcester, MA*

and

GEORGE Y. WU, MD, PhD

*University of Connecticut Health Center,
Farmington, CT*



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Herman Lopata, and to his family who have been so generous with their support of our research on viral hepatitis.

G. Y. W.

PREFACE

Forty years ago, just prior to the discovery of the hepatitis B surface antigen, the concept that chronic liver disease could be a sequel to infection by any agent of acute viral hepatitis was controversial and hotly debated. With the development of specific and sensitive serologic and virologic markers of infection by the bloodborne and enterically transmitted hepatitis viruses, the linkage of the former agents with chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and hepatocellular carcinoma was established beyond doubt. The enterically transmitted viruses, in contrast, elicit self-limited infections without chronic sequelae. In addition, it is now recognized that chronic viral hepatitis is the predominant liver disease throughout the world and although the role of the hepatitis D virus has diminished dramatically in recent years, hepatitis B and C viruses continue to be the most common causes of persistent viremia in the United States, as well as elsewhere. At least 10 million individuals have been infected by these two agents in the United States alone, and over 3 million have active infection. On a global basis, over 2 billion people have been infected by the bloodborne hepatitis viruses and 500 million may have chronic infection; annually, over one million deaths have been attributed to these chronic infections. End-stage liver disease arising from chronic viral hepatitis is the single most common indication for liver transplantation and the rising incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma in this country and elsewhere has been attributed to chronic hepatitis B and C infections.

The prevalence and morbidity and mortality of chronic viral hepatitis underscore the necessity to provide clear and accurate information to healthcare professionals who encounter affected patients. Enormous progress has been made in diagnosis and in understanding the epidemiology and natural history of infection, its associated liver disease, and factors affecting rates of progression. Therapeutic interventions now permit clearance of virus, interruption of disease progression, and restoration of health-related quality of life, and life expectancy, in a substantial and growing number of patients. Yet much remains unknown. Continuing research will be necessary to ensure that infection rates decline through expanded use of hepatitis B vaccine, the development of a hepatitis C vaccine, and education about the dangers of high-risk behaviors. It will also be essential to develop new therapies for those

with established infections and to improve the benefits of current therapies by finding optimal regimens for viral clearance and reversal of liver injury.

Chronic Viral Hepatitis: Diagnosis and Therapeutics will provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the field of chronic viral hepatitis arising from the hepatitis B and C viruses, with a focus on epidemiology, natural history, the problem of co-infections, and a number of facets of patient management. The latter include contributions on developing the therapeutic plan, supporting the patient during treatment, alternative treatment, the use of drugs in chronic viral hepatitis, liver transplantation, and pregnancy in chronic viral hepatitis. In each instance, the authors are leading scientists, clinicians, and clinical investigators who bring to each chapter an extensive review of the available literature, a critical understanding of the state-of-the-art, as well as a broad experience in clinical trials and the management of patients with chronic viral hepatitis.

It has been a pleasure to participate with this outstanding group of contributors in the creation of this book. I hope it will serve as a useful guide for the reader and set the stage for understanding future advances in this field.

Raymond S. Koff, MD

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CONTRIBUTORS

- MANEL F. ABDELMALEK, MD • *Section of Hepatobiliary Diseases, University of Florida College of Medicine, Gainesville, FL*
- NEZAM H. AFDHAL, MD • *Liver Center, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, MA*
- AIJAZ AHMED, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Medicine, Stanford University Medical Center, Stanford, CA*
- TERENCE L. ANGTUACO, MD • *Section of Hepatology, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, Chicago, IL*
- AJAY BATRA, MD • *Division of Digestive Disease and Nutrition, University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center, Worcester, MA*
- KENT BENNER, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, OR*
- HERBERT L. BONKOVSKY, MD • *Division of Digestive Disease and Nutrition, University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center, Worcester, MA*
- ROBERT L. CARITHERS, MD • *Department of Medicine, Hepatology Section, University of Washington Medical Center, Seattle, WA*
- RAYMOND T. CHUNG, MD • *Department of Medicine and Gastrointestinal Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA*
- RENE DAVILA, MD • *Department of Medicine, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Memphis, TN*
- GARY L. DAVIS, MD • *Section of Hepatobiliary Diseases, University of Florida College of Medicine, Gainesville, FL*
- JULES L. DIENSTAG, MD • *Department of Medicine and Gastrointestinal Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA*
- DOUGLAS T. DIETERICH, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Cabrini Medical Center, and Department of Medicine, NYU School of Medicine, New York, NY*
- GREGORY T. EVERSON, MD • *Section of Hepatology, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Denver, CO*
- KEN FLORA, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, OR*

- DAVID G. FORCIONE, MD • *Department of Medicine and Gastrointestinal Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA*
- TIFFANY GEAHIGAN, PA-C • *Liver Center, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, MA*
- GEHAD GHAITH, MD • *Gastroenterology–Hepatology Section, William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, MI*
- STUART C. GORDON, MD • *Gastroenterology–Hepatology Section, William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, MI*
- DONALD M. JENSEN, MD • *Section of Hepatology, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke’s Medical Center, Chicago, IL*
- EMMET B. KEEFFE, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Medicine, Stanford University Medical Center, Stanford, CA*
- RAYMOND S. KOFF, MD • *Department of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA*
- RICHARD W. LAMBRECHT, PHD • *Division of Digestive Disease and Nutrition, University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center, Worcester, MA*
- ANNA SUK-FONG LOK, MD • *Division of Gastroenterology, University of Michigan Medical Center, Ann Arbor, MI*
- MICHAEL A. POLES, MD • *Division of Digestive Diseases, UCLA Center for Health Sciences, Los Angeles, CA*
- ROBERT REINDOLLAR, MD • *Carolina Center for Liver Disease, Charlotte, NC*
- CAROLINE A. RIELY, MD • *Department of Medicine, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Memphis, TN*
- ROBERT M. SMITH, BS • *Division of Gastroenterology–Hepatology, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT*
- ENG-KIONG TEO, MB, BS • *Division of Gastroenterology, University of Michigan Medical Center, Ann Arbor, MI*
- GEORGE Y. WU, MD, PHD • *Division of Gastroenterology–Hepatology, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT*