Egypt has the highest prevalence of chronic HCV of any country worldwide—estimated at a rate of up to 8.5% in 2008, but declining to 7.3% in 2013. The decline in the rate of chronic HCV was because of two factors—deaths related to HCV or people with HCV who died of other causes, and because of the number of people successfully treated with HCV medications.

The number of people in Egypt who have actually been diagnosed is only at 15% of the total population with hepatitis C. Annually, there are 125,000 newly diagnosed chronic HCV cases.

HCV genotype 4 is the most common strain in Egypt followed by HCV genotype 1 (90% and 10% respectively).

**Transmission**

Blood-to-blood contact transmits hepatitis C. In Egypt the most common transmission routes include:

- Sharing needles and works for injection drug use (medical, traditional practices and recreational use),
- Receiving a blood transfusion or an organ transplant,
- Dental practices,
- Circumcision,
- Medical care from local informal health providers and centers.
Some of the transmission is the result of a mass campaign in the 1960’s through the 1980’s to control schistosomiasis infection—a parasitic disease transferred by snails to humans wading in water while working in rice fields. At that time, schistosomiasis was treated with injections of the drug “tartar emetic” using unsterilized and re-used syringes.

Today, as in the past, the majority of infections are the result of transmission from unsafe medical practices. Culturally, Egyptians have many needless injections and blood transfusions using unsafe blood, needles and tools. This includes:

- Unsterilized medical and dental instruments,
- Gloves used on multiple patients,
- Blood spills not cleaned up,
- One-use vials used on more than one patient,
- Used syringes

**Blood Safety Training**

Egypt has a national plan in place to train medical staff and the population (urban and rural) about blood safety. Egypt is a poor country that has many cultural practices that will need to be addressed before blood safety practices can change.

**Deaths**

In 2013, there were 153,000 deaths recorded—33,000 related to HCV; 120,000 deaths for all-cause mortality. HCV can be a contributing factor for non-HCV related deaths so the actual number of deaths related to HCV might be higher.

**Treatment**

The Ministry of Health treats 50,000 patients a year; Health Insurance Organization treats 10,000; 5,000 patients paid cash for treatment.

*Note:* The HCV protease inhibitors—boceprevir and telaprevir—only have antiviral activity against HCV genotype 1.

The Ministry of Health has a national treatment program that provides free treatment for most patients. By 2013, the total number of patients with HCV treated reached 350,000. Until recently pegylated interferon and ribavirin were the standards of care. The cure
rates in the Egyptian population with HCV genotype 4 was 54-59%.

Now there is Sovaldi (plus pegylated interferon and ribavirin) which has a cure rate for HCV genotype 4 at 96% (more than 9 out of 10 people). There are even more drugs that are being studied to treat hepatitis C genotype 4 that may be able to cure everyone, but these drugs are expensive.

The drug company that makes Sovaldi, Gilead, has made a deal with the Egyptian government that will make the course of treatment much cheaper for Egyptians. Twelve weeks of Sovaldi will cost $300 per Egyptian patient compared to $84,000 per US patient.

Treating millions of Egyptians and educating/training 85 million people about prevention measures seems like an incredibly uphill battle for any country especially a country that has a large urban and rural poor population that is recovering from a revolution.

But Egypt has one of the oldest civilizations in the world and has survived thousands of years, so conquering HCV may just be a matter of a united will.

**Resources:**
- **The Association of Liver Patients Care (ALPC)** is a non government-\al organization founded in 1997 in Dakahliah- Egypt
  
  http://www.liver-ri.org.eg/en/

- **Terous:** http://terous.org/

---

**Egypt has one of the oldest civilizations in the world and has survived thousands of years, so conquering HCV may just be a matter of a united will.**

Alan Franciscus is the Founder and Executive Director of the Hepatitis C Support Project and Editor-in-Chief of the HCV Advocate website