

# Top HCV Stories of 2000

The Hepatitis C Support Project / HCV Advocate staff has compiled a list of the top HCV stories for 2000. Without a doubt, the unanimous choice for the top story of 2000 was pegylated interferon. It was not so easy to assign ranking to the other stories, so they are not in any particular order of importance, but we all considered these important for 2000.

On behalf of the staff of the Hepatitis C Support Project / HCV Advocate, I would like to wish a very happy and healthy New Year for you and your loved ones, and thank you for your ongoing support.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our staff and volunteers for their excellent efforts to provide education and support to the HCV community.

## 1. Pegylated Interferon

We wrote about PEG interferon more than any other story in 2000. Rightly so—emerging data has shown that Peg is far superior to standard interferon and may rival combination therapy. Even more impressive were the results reported from clinical trials on the combination of Peg and ribavirin – up to 54% sustained response rates. Not only is Peg more effective in killing HCV, but it also seems to improve the health of the liver. Another big benefit of Peg is that clinical trials with Peg have shown that treating people with cirrhosis is effective and beneficial in improving the health of the liver. And we can't forget another BIG plus - you only have to inject once a week instead of 3 to 7 times.

## 2. Schering's FDA Application to Unbundle Rebretron (Intron A & Rebetrol – ribavirin)

Finally, ribavirin will be available for use with other brands of interferon (and eventually with Peg) and dose modifications of ribavirin interferon will be made easier. This is very good news for patients and it will put medical care and health maintenance back into the hands of doctors, where it belongs!

## 3. HIV/HCV Co-infection

2000 brought a wealth of awareness and information to the very complex issues of care and treatment for individuals co-infected with HIV and HCV. Published guidelines were introduced this year that will provide doctors and patients with information on how to best treat co-infection with these two diseases.

## 4. Natural Disease Progression

The beginning of 2000 saw published rates of serious disease progression at 20-25%. Now, many recent long-term studies are showing that it may be closer to 10-15%. Some groups studied report even lower rates to severe disease progression, such as the group of East German women who only had a 3% rate to serious disease progression after becoming infected with HCV over 20 years ago. These studies speak very well for the follow up care and counseling on lifestyle changes that could help stop or arrest disease progression.

## 5. Stem Cells

Scientists were able to prove that stem cells make liver cells. This has a tremendous potential for research into new therapies to treat HCV and other liver diseases as well as the development of an artificial liver.

## 6. Sexual Transmission

More and more research is confirming that sexual transmission of HCV is very, very low. But we shouldn't forget that safer sex should always be considered for people with multiple sexual partners to protect from HCV and all those other diseases out there that can be transmitted by sex.

## 7. Chronic HCV

At the beginning of 2000, the published figures of people that cleared HCV on their own were 15%. Now,

some studies are suggesting that the rate that people clear HCV on their own may be closer to 20-25%. One of the hottest areas of research is determining why some people become chronic and others clear the virus of their own. This research could lead to better treatment options in the future.

### **8. Grass Roots Hepatitis C Coalitions**

Various news stories covered hepatitis C grass roots coalitions around the country and the involvement of pharmaceuticals – in particular Schering's role in sponsoring 'grass roots' coalitions. Subsequently, it brought the debate of funding and the degree of involvement of pharmaceuticals to the forefront and initiated needed changes to put the 'grass' back into the 'roots' of these organizations.

### **9. AASLD**

This year's American Association for the Study of Liver Disease was incredible.

10. The amount of data presented was astonishing and very promising.

### **11. HCV Cells Cultured**

Scientists replicated HCV variants in cell culture for the first time. This has the potential to change the landscape of HCV research. Up until now, research has been hampered by the lack of an effective model for HCV research. Watch this story because it will make big waves in research.

### **12. Surgeon General Issues Dear Citizen Letter**

The US Surgeon General wrote a 'Dear Citizen' letter concerning HCV that would have dramatically increased public awareness of HCV in the United States, if it had been sent. The only other 'Dear Citizen' letter was on HIV, and it was sent in the 1980's. This *should* have been the top story for the year, but the lack of funding made it disappointing at best for those of us who believe this should be a number one priority for our nation's health care system.