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***Retrospective Study***

**Efficacy and safety of dual therapy with daclatasvir, asunaprevir, in elderly patients**

Tarao K *et al*. Daclatasvir/asunaprevir in elderly patients

**Kazuo Tarao, Katsuaki Tanaka, Akito Nozaki, Akira Sato, Toshiya Ishii, Hirokazu Komatsu, Takaaki Ikeda, Tatsuji Komatsu, Shozo Matsushima, Kenji Oshige**

**Kazuo Tarao,** Tarao’s Gastroenterological Clinic, Yokohama 241-0821, Japan

**Katsuaki Tanaka,** **Akito Nozaki,** Gastroenterological Center, Medical Center, Yokohama City University, Yokohama 232-0024, Japan

**Akira Sato, Toshiya Ishii,** Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Internal Medicine, St. Marianna University, Yokohama City Seibu Hospital, Yokohama 241-0811, Japan

**Hirokazu Komatsu,** Department of Gastroenterology, Yokohama Municipal Citizen’s Hospital, Yokohama 240-8555, Japan

**Takaaki Ikeda,**Gastroenterology Department, Yokosuka General Hospital Uwamachi, Yokosuka 238-8567, Japan

**Tatsuji Komatsu, Shozo Matsushima,** Department of Clinical Research, National Hospital Organization, Yokohama Medical Center, Yokohama 245-8575, Japan

**Kenji Oshige,** Yokohama National University, Center for Health Service Sciences, Yokohama 240-8501, Japan

**Author contributions:** Tarao K designed the research; Tanaka K, Nozaki A, Ishii T, Komatsu H, Ikeda T, Komatsu T, Matsushima S followed up the HCV patients in field practice; Oshige K analyzed the data; Tarao K wrote the paper. All the descriptions of the paper were distributed to all authors and confirmed.

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**Correspondence to: Kazuo Tarao, MD,** Tarao’s Gastroenterological Clinic, Taiyo-Building, 2-58-6, Futamatagawa, Asahi-ku, Yokohama 241-0821, Japan. nrg18449@nifty.com

**Telephone:** +81-45-3606501

**Fax:** +81-45-3606502

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**Abstracts**

***AIM***

To survey the efficacy and safety of dual therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir in the elderly hepatitis C virus (HCV) patients multicentricity.

***METHODS***

Interferon-ineligible/intolerant patients and non-responders to previous pegylated interferon/ribavirin therapy with chronic HCV genotype 1b infection were enrolled. Child B, C cirrhotic patients were excluded. Patients received oral direct acting antivirals, 60 mg daclatasvir once daily plus 200 mg asunaprevir twice daily for 24 wk. We divided the patients into two groups; 56 elderly patients (≥ 75 years old) and 141 non-elderly patients (< 75 years old) and compared the efficacy and safety.

***RESULTS***

Ninety-one point one percent of elderly patients and 90.1% of non-elderly patients achieved SVR24. In the former 1.8% experienced viral breakthrough, as compared with 3.5% in the latter (not significant). Adverse events occurred in 55.4% of the former and 56.0% of the latter. In the former 7 cases (12.5%) were discontinued due to adverse events and in the latter 9 cases (6.4%, not significant).

***CONCLUSION***

Dual therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir achieved the same high rates of SVR24 in HCV elderly patients without more adverse events as in the non-elderly patients.

**Key words:** Asunaprevir; Chronic hepatitis; Daclatasvir; Dual oral therapy; Elderly patients; Hepatitis C virus infection; Hepatitis C virus; Liver cirrhosis

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**Core tip:** Recently, it was demonstrated that dual oral therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir without pegylated interferon/ribavirin was well tolerated and achieved high SVR rates in Japanese patients with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) genotype Ιb infection, including patients with liver cirrhosis (Child A stage). However, previous study of the efficacy and side effects of these drugs was studied in the non-elderly patients less than 70 years. And those in elderly patients, who were supposed to have higher incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma, have not been studied. We demonstrated that efficacy and side effects in elderly patients was nearly the same as in non-elderly patients.

Tarao K, Tanaka K, Nozaki A, Sato A, Ishii T, Komatsu H, Ikeda T, Komatsu T, Matsushima S, Oshige K. Efficacy and safety of dual therapy with daclatasvir, asunaprevir, in elderly patients. *World J Hepatol* 2017; In press

**INTRODUCTION**

Recently, it was demonstrated that dual oral therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir without pegylated interferon/ribavirin was well tolerated and achieved high SVR rates in difficult-to-treat Japanese patients with chronic HCV genotype Ib infection, including patients with liver cirrhosis (Child A stage)[1-4].

It is generally accepted that the average age of the patients with HCV-associated liver disease in Japan is increasing, and indeed patients more than 60 yrs old represent more than 70% of all patients[5]. Moreover, Kumada *et al*[6] recently analysed the age distribution of 3388 persistent HCV-infected patients and found that the median age was 70 years, and 2249 (66.4%) were elderly patients more than 65 years old.

Also recently, Asahina *et al*[7] demonstrated that the risk for hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) after interferon treatment was age-dependent and increased predominantly when the age at primary liver biopsy was > 65 years. They also demonstrated that progression of fibrosis over time was significantly accelerated in older patients. In addition, elderly patients with HCV-associated chronic hepatitis are thought to develop liver cirrhosis more rapidly, and HCC might develop more frequently as a result. An increase in the aged population is an impending problem, and we must eradicate the HCV infection as soon as possible in elderly patients.

We therefore retrospectively examined the efficacy and safety of dual therapy with the nonstructural protein 5A inhibitor, daclatasvir, and the nonstructural protein 3 protein inhibitor, asunaprevir, in elderly patients (≥ 75 years old) with hepatitis C chronic hepatitis or liver cirrhosis (Child A stage) who may have suffered from longer periods of HCV infection in many large hospitals in Kanagawa Prefecture in Japan.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

***Study design***

This study included two populations of patients with HCV genotype 1b infection: null responders (< 2 log10 decline of serum HCV RNA levels after 12 wk of prior PegIFNα/RBV), and PegIFNα/RBV ineligible/intolerant patients. The latter group was either patients who discontinued prior therapy with PegIFNα/RBV due to intolerance after < 12 wk, or patients who were treatment-naïve but poor candidates for PegIFN-α/RBL for medical reasons such as advanced age or complications of depression, anemia, myelosuppression, diabetes or cardiovascular or renal dysfunction. Of the cirrhotic patients only those with Child-Pugh stage A were enrolled[8], and patients with Child-Pugh stages B and C were omitted. The patients were out patients and visited the following hospitals in Kanagawa Prefecture of Japan between 1 September 2014 and 30 March 2015: Tarao’s Gastroenterological Clinic, Yokohama City University Medical Center, Yokohama Seibu Hospital of St. Marianna University, Yokohama Municipal Citizens Hospital, Yokosuka General Hospital Uwamachi, and National Hospital Organization Yokohama Medical Center.

Elderly patients were defined as those equal to or over 75 years old. Enrolled patients were divided into two groups, elderly patients (≥ 75 years old) and non-elderly patients (< 75 years old), and efficacy and safety assessments were compared. The primary efficacy end point was the proportion of patients with undetectable HCV-RNA at 24 wk post treatment (SVR24).

Written informed consent was obtained from all patients. The study was approved by institutional review boards in each hospital and conducted in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

***Patients***

Eligible patients were men and women aged 34-83 years with HCV genotype1 infection with chronic hepatitis or compensated liver cirrhosis. Patients with cirrhosis were confined to Child-Pugh stage A[8], and patients with stage B and C cirrhosis were excluded. Exclusionary laboratory findings included alanine aminotransferase (ALT) > 5 × upper limit of normal (ULN), total birilubin > 2 mg/dL, albumin < 3.5g/dL, hemoglobin < 9.0g/dL, white blood cells < 1500mm3, platelets < 50000/mm3, and creatinine > 1.8 × ULN. No patients had prior exposure to HCV DAAs.

***Analysis of resistant-associated variants***

At prc-treatment points, the resistant-associated variants (RAVs) in NS5A (Y93H) were investigated by PCR-invader assay. PCR-invader assays were conducted by BML Inc. (Saitama, Japan), and weakly positive and negative samples were defined as substitution-negative. In the 132 out of 197 cases the RAVs was examined, and the results were as follows; Y93H ≤ 1% 116 cases (87.9%), 2%-5% 14 cases (10.6%), 23% 1 case (7.6%), 64% 1 case (7.6%).

***Study drug dosing***

Patients received 24 wk of treatment with 60 mg daclatasvir once daily, combined with 200 mg asunaprevir twice daily, with 24 wk of post-treatment follow-up. HCV RNA, physical examinations, adverse events, laboratory parameters, and concomitant medications were assessed at days 1 (baseline), weeks 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 20 and 24, and post-treatment weeks 4, 8, 12, 24.

***Statistical analysis***

Pearson’s *χ*2 test and the Student’s *t*-test were used for statistical analyses. Statistical significance was considered to exist at *P* < 0.05.

**RESULTS**

A total of 197 patients were enrolled in this retrospective study; 56 elderly patients and 141 non-elderly patients. Backgrounds of the patients are shown in Table 1. In the elderly patients the number of cirrhotic patients (53.6%) was significantly larger, as compared with 31.2% in the non-elderly patients (*P* = 0.003). The average age was 77.8 years in the elderly patients and 65.3 years in the non-elderly patients. The male/female ratio was nearly the same in the two groups (*P =* 0.719). HCV genotype was 1b in all patients. HCV-RNA (mean log 10 IU/mL) was 5.85 ± 0.77 in the former and 6.12 ± 0.70 in the latter (*P =* 0.016). Percentages of the non-responder patients in the previous Peg IFN/Ribavirin therapy were 17.9% in the former and 25.5% in the latter (*P =* 0.251).

***Virologic outcomes***

Of the elderly patients, 51 (91.1%) achieved SVR24 while in the non-elderly patients 127 (90.1%) achieved SVR24. The ratio of patients achieving SVR24 was nearly the same in the two groups (Table 2). The ratio of patients achieved SVR24 in the discontinued due to side effects was 71.4% (5/7) in the elderly and 77.8% (7/9) in the non-elderly patients (Table 2).

***Viral breakthrough***

Only one patient out of 56 (1.8%) experienced viral breakthrough in the elderly group, as compared with 5 out of 141 (3.5%) in the non-elderly group (not significant, *P =* 0.519). Post treatment relapse was seen in 2 (3.6%) of the elderly patients as compared with 7 (5.0%) of the non-elderly patients (not significant, *P =* 0.675) (Table 2).

***Safety***

Adverse events and laboratory abnormalities in each group are shown in Table 3. There were no significant differences in each event between elderly and non-elderly groups. The total number of patients who showed adverse events in the elderly group was 31 out of 56 (55.4%), which was nearly the same in the non-elderly group (79 out of 141, 56.0%) (Table 4).

Table 5 shows the causes of discontinuation and the numbers of patients in whom the drugs were discontinued due to adverse effects in each group. The levels of elevation of ALT and total bilirubin at which the drug was discontinued; 200 INU (5 folds normal) for ALT and 3.0 mg/dL for total bilirubin. In the elderly group 7 out of 56 cases (12.5%) were discontinued, and in the non-elderly group 9 out of 141 (6.4%). The ratio of discontinuation was greater for the elderly patients but the difference was not significant (*P =* 0.336). The ratio of patients achieved SVR24 in the discontinued due to side effects was 71.4% (5/7) in the elderly and 77.8% (7/9) in the non-elderly patients (Table 2).

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008.

Informed consent was obtained from all patients for being included in the study. The protocol was approved by the ethics committees/institutional review boards of participating centers and conformed to Good Clinical Practice guidelines and Declaration of Helsinki principles. This article does not contain any studies with animal subjects.

**DISCUSSION**

In the recent years patients with HCV associated chronic hepatitis or liver cirrhosis have become older, especially those patients with liver cirrhosis[5-7]. Among these patients, the occurrence of HCC is also increasing. It is generally well accepted that aging is a potent risk factor for HCC development in patients with HCV-associated liver disease[7-11]. Peg-interferon α/ribavirin (Peg-IFNα/RBV) therapy was effective in preventing the development of HCC in younger patients[12]. However, older patients are poor candidates for peg-IFNα/RBL therapy.

More recently, oral dual therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir was demonstrated to be very effective in eradicating HCV infection. Over all, 76.7% of patients achieved SVR12 and SVR24 in an initial trial[2].

In this study, we demonstrated that the proportion of patients with sustained virologic response (SVR) at 24 wk post-treatment was almost the same among elderly patients (≥ 75 years old) who were thought to have longer durations of HCV-infection, as among younger patients (< 75 years old, 91.1% *vs* 90.1%).

We also demonstrated that the degree of side effects was nearly the same in the elderly and younger patients. Hitherto, no report has dealt with age differences in the efficacy and side effects of oral dual administration of daclatasvir/asunaprevir.

Is there any essential benefit in eradicating HCV in elderly patients (≥ 75 years old) with HCV associated liver disease by administering daclatasvir/asunaprevir?

There is much evidence that the eradication of HCV virus (sustained viral response, SVR) by interferon or pegylated-IFN and rivavirin treatment brings about a low incidence of HCC development [12-18].

There is no definite evidence that the eradication of HCV virus by dual therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir can bring about a low incidence of HCC in SVR patients. However, there is some potential for these drugs to lower the risk of HCC development. First, there is some evidence of lowering serum alfapetoprotein (AFP) levels after eradicating HCV virus by the dual therapy, which is one of the potential risk factors for HCC development in HCV-associated liver diseases[19-24]. Oka H *et al*[25,26]actually demonstrated that the serum AFP level was a potential risk factor for HCC development in the cirrhotic patients.

Karino *et al*[20] compared the changes of serum AFP levels after treatment by Peg/Ribavirin and by DCV/ASV treatment; they were 13.7-4.9 ng/mL on average in Peg/RBV and 15.2-4.8 ng/mL in DCV/ASV. Moreover, the proportions of patients who showed below 5ng/ml after SVR were 56% in Peg/RBV and 65% in DCV/ASV treatment, suggesting nearly the same effect on AFP levels with both treatment. More recently Miyaki *et al*[24] examined the changes in AFP levels before and after the dual therapy (median 27 mo after the completion of the therapy), and found a significant decrease in SVR patients (AFP levels decreased to within the normal limit in all patients by 18 months after treatment).

Second is the potential of dual therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir to reduce liver fibrosis. Miyaki *et al*[24] observed the changes of liver fibrosis markers before and after the administration of the drugs and found a significant increase in platelet counts and a significant decrease in liver fibrosis markers such as hyaluronic acid, type IV collagen and M2BPGi (a liver fibrosis glycobiomarker) at 27 mo (median) after completion of the treatment. Adriaan *et al*[27] also demonstrated a significant increase in the platelet counts associated with a decrease in spleen volume after the completion of interferon therapy.

There is some evidence that eradication of HCV-virus by IFN might bring about a decrease in the fibrosis staging score of HCV-associated chronic hepatitis. Shiratori *et al*[28] demonstrated that the fibrosis score after interferon therapy had regressed in patients with a sustained response at a rate of -0.28unit/year, in the histological examination of the biopsied specimens, suggesting that the staging of fibrosis might be reduced by one step in every four years by IFN in SVR patients. And it is well known that the staging of fibrosis has a close association with the incidence of HCC development[29]. Omata[29] surveyed the relationship between the degree of fibrosis and the incidence of HCC in HCV-associated chronic hepatitis and found that the incidence of HCC was 0.46%/year in patients with slight fibrosis (F1 stage), while in patients with moderate fibrosis (F3 stage) it was 3%/year, and in patients with severe fibrosis (F4 stage) it was 7%/year.

In support of this concept, Adriaan *et al*[27] demonstrated an increase in platelet counts associated with a decrease in spleen volume in the IFN-treated SVR patients among HCV-associated patients with Ishak 4-6 fibrosis, and concluded that the portal hypertension was decreased in those patients.

Considering the above evidence, it is possible that the eradication of HCV virus by dual therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir might brings about reduction in fibrosis and a lower incidence of HCC development even in patients over 75 years old, who have an impending risk of HCC development.

However, long term observations of SVR patients after therapy with daclatasvir and asunaprevir will be necessary to make any final conclusions about the effect on prevention of HCC development.

**COMMENTS**

***Background***

Recently, direct acting antivirals (DAAs), including dual therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir, were widely used in the therapy of chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) genotype Ib infection. Dual therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir was demonstrated to be highly effective without serious side-effects. However, those results were studied in the non-elderly patients under 70 years old. The effectiveness and safety in the elderly patients (> 70 years old) should be studied.

***Research frontiers***

Although, DAAs were widely used in the treatment of HCV-associated liver diseases, few prior reports surveyed the difference in the efficacy and side effects of dual oral therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir between elderly patients and non-elderly patients.

***Innovation and breakthrough***

In this study, the effectiveness and safety of the therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir were demonstrated in the elderly patients as well as in the non-elderly patients.

***Applications***

In Japanese, recently the aged population was increasing rapidly in HCV-associated liver disease and they have high-risk for developing hepatocellular carcinoma. So, there were many candidates for eradicating HCV in these papulation. Now, we can eradicate HCV by oral therapy with daclatasvir/asunaprevir effectively and safely.

***Peer-review***

The manuscript is interesting one discussing very important issue as regard new DAAs with HCV treatment.

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**Table 1 Background of elderly (≥ 75 years old) and non-elderly (< 75 years old) patients**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameter** | **Elderly****patients (*n* = 56)** | **Non-elderly****patients ( *n* = 141)** | ***P*** |
| Cirrhosis/chronic hepatitis | 30/26 | 44/97 | 0.003 |
| Age, yr | 77.8(75-83) | 65.3(34-74) |  |
| Male/Female | 23/33(41.1%/58.9%) | 54/87(38.3%/61.7%) |  |
| HCV genotype 1b, % | 100% | 100% |  |
| HCV-RNA mean log10 IU/mL | 5.85 ± 0.77 | 6.12 ± 0.70 |  |
| Peg IFN/Ribavirin non-responder % | 17.9% | 25.5% | 0.251 |

**Table 2 Virologic outcomes**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameter** | **Elderly****patients (*n* = 56)** | **Non-elderly****patients ( *n* = 141)** | ***P*** |
| SVR24 (*n*,%) | 51 (91.1%) | 127 (90.1%) |  |
| Viral breakthrough (*n*,%) | 1 (1.8%) | 5 (3.5%) | 0.519 |
| Post treatment relapse (*n*,%) | 2 (3.6%) | 7 (5.0%) | 0.675 |
| The ratio of patients achieved SVR24 in the discontinued cases due to side effects (*n*,%) | 5/7 (71.4%) | 7/9 (77.8%) |  |

**Table 3 Adverse events and laboratory abnormalities**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Event, *n* (%)** | **Elderly****patients (*n* = 56)** | **Non-elderly****patients ( *n* = 141)** |
| Nasopharyngitis | 5 | (8.9) | 6 | (4.3) |
| Headache | 4 | (7.1) | 9 | (6.4) |
| Diarrhea | 3 | (5.4) | 5 | (3.5) |
| Pyrexia | 2 | (3.6) | 12 | (8.5) |
| Malaise | 7 | ( 12.5) | 8 | (5.7) |
| Anorexia | 6 | ( 10.7) | 8 | (5.7) |
| AST elevation | 15 | ( 26.8) | 55 | ( 39.0) |
| ALT elevation | 14 | ( 25.0) | 54 | ( 38.3) |
| Hb decrease | 8 | ( 14.3) | 11 | ( 7.8) |
| T-bil increase | 2 | ( 3.6) | 11 | ( 7.8) |
| Creatinin increase | 8 | ( 14.3) | 13 | ( 9.2) |

**Table 4 Total number of adverse events in the elderly and non-elderly patients**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Elderly patients** | **Non-elderly patients** |
| Total patients enrolled | 56 | 141 |
| Patients who showed adverse events | 31 | 79 |
| Percentage of patients who showed adverse events | 55.4% | 56.0% |

**Table 5 Causes of discontinuation and numbers of patients in whom the study drugs were discontinued due to adverse events in the elderly and non-elderly groups**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Elderly patients** | **Non-elderly patients** |
| 16 w Malaise, Anorexia16 w Malaise, Anorexia16 w Elevation of ALT18 w Elevation of ALT13 w Pyrexia4 w Cough18 w Development of HCC1 | 18 w Elevation of ALT16 w Elevation of ALT12 w Pyrexia13 w Pyrexia13 w Sepsis due to hemolytic streptococcus118 w abdominal fullness12 w elongation of PT3 w elevation of T-bilirubin118 w development of HCC1 |
| Total　　7/56 (12.5%) | 9/141 (6.4%) |

1Patients achieved SVR24. The level of elevation of ALT and total bilirubin at which the drug was discontinued; 200 INU (5 folds of normal) for ALT and 3.0 mg/dL for total bilirubin.