

06/03/2014

Dear Colleagues,

Sorry, it has been too long since the last newsletter. It is amazing how quickly a few months can pass. And, if you have not heard, Nallely Mora had her baby boy, Jedrik, last month! Mom and baby are doing well.

In this newsletter I bring attention to the new WHO guidelines on HCV treatment. The question remains, how this will impact public health and clinical care of patients in Africa. Additionally, ongoing study updates are provided, as well as a list of potential funding sources that may be of interest.

NEW ANTI-VIRALS:

The WHO has published its first HCV treatment guidelines with specific mention of the new anti-virals:

(<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/hepatitis-guidelines/en/>)

Certainly a much needed and welcomed document. But raises the questions on how to bring treatment to areas of great need, but more limited resources. A recent article published in NEJM addresses the challenges of HCV treatment in resource limited settings (Jayasekara et al. NEJM, 5/15/2014).

How is this best implemented in sub-Saharan Africa? What are the critical barriers that need to be tackled? It would be great to hear each other's thoughts!

STUDIES:

KATH Blood Bank Study: We have now completed enrollment of 363 individuals, and have one paper under review, with at least one additional manuscript in preparation. We observed high rates of active infection in this population, and identified numerous risk factors for HCV infection. Geographic variation was observed, with individuals from Northern and Upper Ghana tribes having the highest risk for HCV infection. Further, skin piercing practices, especially outside of the medical setting, were linked with HCV risk.

We will send the manuscript to all once published!

Obuasi Population Study: Under the great guidance and efforts of Richard Phillips and Steve Sarfo, enrollment in Obuasi has begun. As of 6/10, over 2,000 individuals have been enrolled, providing blood samples and extensive risk factor survey. Study teams travel to Obuasi twice a week, and have recruited

anywhere between 130-298 participants a day! Please see the great pictures on the website from the study team working at a field site!

This study forms a cornerstone site for our HCV fall grant re-submission, and our HBV grant under review.

HBV Vertical Transmission Survey: Dr Kenrad Nelson and Dr Stephen Ehrhardt, MD have expertise in studying HBV vertical transmission and proposed the idea of interviewing HBV+pregnant women and their clinicians on the feasibility, acceptability, and knowledge of HBV vertical transmission prevention. With the help of Dr Roderick Larsen-Reindorf, a Loyola Medical Student, Anita Cheng, administered a survey to practicing physicians at KNUST this past summer. In June of 2014, a Loyola medical resident, JoAnn Jose, traveled to Kumasi and interviewed over 250 HBV+ pregnant women and their health care providers. Data analysis is now under review.

GRANTS:

HCV in Sub-Saharan Africa: A HepNet study. NIH R01 (co-PIs: J Layden, R Cooper, K Nelson). This was submitted at the end of 2013, and was discussed at study section. A re-submission is being planned for October, 2014. This study is focusing on the population level epidemiology of HCV and will study the viral phylogenetics and transmission of this pathogen.

Molecular and Virologic Study of HBV in Obuasi, Ghana, NIH U01: (co-PIs: R Phillips, J Layden). This was submitted 3/2014 and is to be reviewed next month. This study intends to use the Obuasi cohort to both cross sectionally and longitudinally study HBV, characterizing the molecular and virologic disease states and level of chronicity.

Hepatitis B Infection During Pregnancy and Risk of Perinatal Transmission: (PI: M Obiefune, Consultants: E Ezeanolue, J Layden). Recently submitted, this international R01 submission is focusing on the study and risk of mother to child HBV transmission, capitalizing on the well-established Healthy Baby Initiative Cohort Study (E Ezeanolue, PI).

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Multi-disciplinary Studies on HIV and HCV Co-infection:
grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-14-254.html

Please send any news, updates, papers of interest, or suggest topics of general interest.

Warm wishes to all!

Jen Layden