

# HEPATITIS B AND C: A CHALLENGE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

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Hepatitis B and C virus infections account for a substantial proportion of liver diseases worldwide. They are of global health concern and are quickly coming up as a major health problem in the developing countries like Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> According to WHO figures, more than 2 billion people worldwide have been infected with hepatitis B virus, out of which more than 350 million are chronic carriers. Similarly, 130-170 million people are chronically infected with hepatitis C.<sup>2,3</sup>

The principal long-term sequelae of these infections are cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma.<sup>4</sup>

Spread of these infections is by sharing contaminated needles, using un-sterilized equipment for surgery, tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing, sexual act, from infected mother to baby and through blood transfusion. Doctors particularly surgeons and paramedical staff are at high occupational risk of contracting these infection.<sup>5-10</sup>

The matter is of great concern for the health care providers. In the present issue of the journal only there are at least five articles exploring this problem from different angles. The findings of all these studies are alike i.e. the high prevalence of hepatitis B and C in our community.

Health care providers can not sit back silently and watch. It is high time to combine our efforts and halt hepatitis B and C from further spread.

One may say it is late to act when the enemy has already occupied the area but it is not too late. We need to act in a properly organized and effective way to tackle this problem.

The efforts of course should be multi-faceted including not only the treatment of cases but also the preventive aspect as we have successfully adopted in the past for eradication of other infectious diseases.

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