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**Invited Editorial: the Burden and Aetiology of Liver Cirrhosis and Risk of Death**

**Monica A. Konerman, MD MSc<sup>1</sup> and Rohit Loomba, MD, MHSc<sup>2,3,4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Medicine, University of Michigan

<sup>2</sup>NAFLD Research Center

<sup>3</sup>Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Medicine

<sup>4</sup>Division of Epidemiology, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine

University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093-0063

**Corresponding Author:**

Rohit Loomba, MD, MHSc

Division of Gastroenterology and Epidemiology

University of California at San Diego School of Medicine

9500 Gilman Drive

La Jolla, CA 92093-0063

Ph: 858-534-2624, Fax: 858-534-3338

Email: [roloomba@ucsd.edu](mailto:roloomba@ucsd.edu)

Website : [fattyLiver.ucsd.edu](http://fattyLiver.ucsd.edu)

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Assessing the burden of liver cirrhosis remains pertinent from a public health standpoint, as end stage liver disease is among the top ten leading causes of death worldwide.<sup>1-3</sup> Beyond attributable cause of death, liver cirrhosis is a chronic condition that can necessitate substantial medical care. As a result, cirrhosis accounts for significant health care costs with estimates upwards of \$2.5 billion per year in the United States alone.<sup>4</sup> Although there have been many studies on the incidence, prevalence and natural history of liver cirrhosis, studies generated from the Swedish health care system offer specific advantages due to the nature of their single-provider, well characterized public health care system.<sup>5</sup>

In a recent issue of *Alimentary Pharmacology & Therapeutics*, Nisson *et al* characterized the overall burden of cirrhosis in southern Sweden from 2001-2011.<sup>6</sup> Using the population-based medical registries in Sweden, the authors identified 1317 patients with cirrhosis. Patients were followed for a median of 4.3 years and the annual incidence of liver cirrhosis was estimated as 14.1/100,000. Alcoholic related liver disease was the overwhelming etiology (58%) and ascites was the primary clinical manifestation at the time of diagnosis (43%). The 1-, 5-, and 10-year survival rates were found to be 79%, 47% and 27%, respectively. Furthermore, men and patients with HCV with concomitant alcoholic liver disease had the worst survival rates.<sup>6</sup>

This study has several strengths including a large sample-size, length of longitudinal follow-up, and robust data available for review given the medical infrastructure in Sweden. There are a few notable limitations and unaddressed questions that remain however. Inherent to any retrospective study are the limitations in terms of accurately identifying patients with cirrhosis, capturing complications from cirrhosis, and relevant co-morbidities.<sup>7</sup> Assessing the presence of alcohol abuse is particularly difficult, and in this study is likely under-represented as it was defined using only presence of these diagnoses in the patient's medical chart. The author's approach to categorization of etiology of liver disease is also of interest, specifically the reliability of the diagnosis of NASH and the separation of NASH and cryptogenic cirrhosis. It would have been of interest to also evaluate these two groups combined given that prior

studies have demonstrated that significant proportions of patients defined as having cryptogenic cirrhosis were likely due to NAFLD.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, it would be of interest to outline the rank order of etiologies of cirrhosis on burden of death.

Overall this study adds to the existing body of literature on the global disease burden, natural history, and associated morbidity and mortality related to end stage liver disease. In particular, this study emphasizes the importance of addressing modifiable risk factors, specifically alcohol overuse as this etiology portended a worse prognosis in this cohort. In the wake of the impact of direct-acting antivirals for chronic hepatitis C, alcohol related liver disease and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease will account for progressively larger proportions of the patient population with chronic liver disease and thus represent target areas for research and clinical attention.<sup>9</sup> Future studies are needed in order to identify means to improve outcomes among these high risk patient populations.

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