Acute Hepatitis C: To Treat or Not to Treat?

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Once acute HCV infection has been diagnosed, monitor the patient. In those who spontaneously clear an acute infection, clearance usually occurs within 3 months of the known onset of hepatitis. If HCV viremia has not cleared by 3 months, it is highly likely that the infection will become chronic.

Although no randomized controlled trials have addressed this question, I recommend a 3- to 6-month course of peginterferon-based therapy (with or without ribavirin) in those patients who have failed to clear acute infection. Success rates in this setting (ie, rates of sustained viral clearance) approach 90%. The importance of early treatment is clear: these success rates vastly eclipse those seen in patients with chronic infection.

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