

### **S06.3**

#### **Hepatitis C infection**

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Hepatitis C (HCV) is also known as the silent killer, because of its lack of symptoms and its severe consequences. It has been a widespread infection in the world, including Europe, for decades. Each year, an estimated 3 to 4 million people are infected with HCV globally, causing 350,000 annual deaths. In Europe, it has been recently estimated that almost 19 million people are chronically infected. HCV infection can have severe consequences, such as cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. In fact, it has been shown that the attributable fraction (AF) of cirrhosis for HCV is around 35% (38% for Western and 34% for Eastern Europe). For hepatocellular carcinoma, the AF is 44% for Western Europe and 15% for Eastern Europe.

Previously, the treatment options were poor, with severe side effects and low chances of cure. Therefore HCV case finding was no priority. Recently however, there has been a revolution in treatment possibilities and the chances of curing HCV are very high, with relatively short treatment and limited side-effects. Consequently, patients with chronic infections need to be found and treated before HCV's severe consequences arise. Finding patients with HCV however can be a challenge, since clear symptoms hardly ever occur. The key to finding HCV lies in the identification of risk groups and "catching" them to be referred for treatment. Primary care plays an important role in these identification strategies.

Different case-finding strategies and risk groups for different regions of Europe will be presented, with the aim to find patient with HCV and therefore prevent severe disease burden in a vulnerable population.