Pharmacological management of alcohol dependence in patients with liver disease

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Abstract
Alcohol dependence represents a chronic and relapsing disease affecting nearly 10% of the general population both in the United States and in Europe, with a widespread burden of morbidity and mortality. Alcohol dependence represents the most common cause of liver damage in the Western Countries. Although alcoholic liver disease is associated primarily with heavy drinking, continued alcohol consumption, even in low doses after the onset of liver disease, increases the risk of severe consequences, including mortality. Consequently the ideal treatment of patients affected by alcohol dependence and alcoholic liver disease should aim at achieving long-term total alcohol abstinence and preventing relapse.

The present lecture will provide an update on the pharmacological management of alcohol dependence in patients with alcoholic liver disease. Increasing evidences suggests the usefulness of psychosocial interventions and medications combined in order to reduce alcohol intake, promote abstinence and prevent relapse in alcohol dependent patients. Disulfiram, naltrexone and acamprosate have been approved for this indication; gamma-hydroxybutyric acid (GHB) is approved in Italy and Austria. However, these drugs have not been tested in patients with advanced liver disease. Amongst other emerging pharmacotherapies for alcoholism, topiramate, ondansetron, and baclofen seem the most promising ones. Both topiramate and ondansetron hold a safe profile in alcoholic patients; however, none of them has been tested in alcoholic patients with advanced liver disease. To date, baclofen represents the only anti-craving medication formally tested in a randomized clinical trial in alcoholic patients affected by liver cirrhosis, although additional confirmatory studies are warranted.

Biography
Giovanni Addolorato received his M.D. degree from the University of Bologna and then performed a residency program in Internal Medicine at the Catholic University of Rome, Italy. Since 2001 he has been Assistant Professor at the Internal Medicine Department at the Catholic University of Rome. He has lectured at several international meetings and received numerous prizes. He has organized and managed several multicenter studies the results of which have been published in peer reviewed journals (Alcohol Alcoholism 1996; Lancet 1998; Drug Alcohol Depend 1998; Lancet 2007). In 2002 he obtained a patent for a new drug in the treatment of alcohol addiction. Dr. Addolorato’s scientific publications include more than 500 publications. They include 192 publications in peer reviewed journals (Impact Factor: 667; H index: 31). He is a reviewer for several scientific peer reviewed journals. He is Chief Editor of “Frontiers in Addictive Disorders”, associate Editor of “Alcoholologia: European Journal of Alcohol Studies” and member of the Editorial Board of “Alcohol & Alcoholism”, “European Addiction Research” and “World Journal of Gastroenterology”. In 2008, Dr. Addolorato was presented with the Italian Society on Liver Studies (AISF) Distinguished Researcher Award. He is Member of the European Research Advisory Board (ERAB) (since 2006). He is Member of the National Anti-Drugs Commission of the Department for Anti-drug Policies, Office of the Government of Italy (since 2009).