

UCLA Program Update

UCLA Asian Liver Program

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The UCLA Asian Liver Program is the only center of its kind in Southern California – home to the fastest-growing population of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. These communities have rates of hepatitis infection and liver disease that are many times higher than those for the rest of the population.

UCLA Asian Liver Program physicians treat all forms of hepatitis – a viral infection that causes inflammation in the liver and can lead to permanent liver damage – and other diseases of the liver, gallbladder and bile ducts. With experts in hepatology, surgery, and diagnostic and interventional radiology, UCLA's program provides the full range of diagnostic, medical and surgical care. This includes the resources to evaluate all levels of liver and bile-duct diseases and provide the latest anti-viral treatments and surgical interventions, ranging from minimally invasive procedures to liver transplantation. UCLA has established itself as a leading center of research and treatment innovation, offering its patients the newest therapies, including investigational treatments available only at a few centers.



Asian Liver Disease

Diseases related to hepatitis B and C are the leading killer among Asians. Most Asians acquire hepatitis B as a consequence of vertical transmission from their mothers during birth and later in life via child-to-child transmission. Because of their underdeveloped immune systems, nearly all infants exposed to the virus will become chronic carriers of hepatitis B. As



adults, they are at high risk for developing liver cancer or cirrhosis, a condition that leads to irreversible scarring of the liver. In addition, many Asians acquire the hepatitis C virus prior to immigration to the United States. These patients are also at high risk for developing liver cancer or cirrhosis.

Medical Treatment

While there is no cure for hepatitis B, a vaccine that prevents hepatitis B infection and anti-viral medications are very effective in suppressing viral multiplication in the liver. Unfortunately, many susceptible people – even in the U.S. – are not vaccinated, and hepatitis B remains a major health problem. Because chronic hepatitis B carriers often have no symptoms and feel healthy, it is usually not diagnosed except by screening with a simple and inexpensive blood test – hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). When symptoms do appear, it is often in the late stages of liver disease when treatment is more difficult and less effective. If untreated, hepatitis B leads to liver cancer or cirrhosis in as many as one in four individuals.

No vaccine exists for hepatitis C. Anti-viral treatments, however, may lead to elimination of the virus and, for many patients, may reduce the complications of this liver disease. Hepatologists at the UCLA Asian Liver Program follow patients who have chronic hepatitis, monitor their disease and provide treatment.

Hepatitis infections are treated with anti-viral medications to suppress liver inflammation and to reduce the chances of spreading these viral infections to others. Management of hepatitis patients includes ultrasound and endoscopic screenings to detect early liver damage due to cirrhosis and liver cancer. These screening tests help physicians detect liver cancer when it is in its earliest, most-treatable stages. Program physicians also help manage the complications of cirrhosis and evaluate patients as possible candidates for liver transplantation.

Conditions that are treated medically include:

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Autoimmune hepatitis
- Primary biliary cirrhosis
- Cirrhosis of other etiologies
- Primary sclerosing cholangitis

Surgical Treatment

UCLA surgeons have extensive experience with resective surgery (surgery to remove damaged tissue), and now offer minimally invasive (laparoscopic) procedures to treat conditions related to the liver and biliary tracts. In the hands of highly experienced surgeons, laparoscopic surgery can produce excellent outcomes with less surgical trauma, diminished pain and faster recoveries.

Conditions that can be treated surgically include:

- Primary cancers of the liver caused by hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- Other cancers of the liver, including metastatic tumors to the liver (most commonly from the colon)
- Cancers of the gallbladder and bile duct
- Benign lesions of the liver and bile ducts
- Bile obstruction or restriction due to previous parasitic infection, which is common in Asia, or cancer of the bile duct
- Portal hypertension. Shunting procedures can provide a full or partial diversion of blood flow from the portal system to stop acute gastrointestinal bleeding or prevent re-bleeding in patients with portal-hypertension advanced liver disease

Liver Transplantation

UCLA is fortunate to have one of the most successful and busiest liver-transplant programs in the world. Among the first centers to offer liver transplantation in the United States, UCLA has been a leader in developing new surgical techniques that make the most-effective use of donor organs, a resource that is always in limited supply. UCLA surgeons have performed more than 4,000 liver transplants for end-stage liver diseases, as well as liver transplantation for primary cancers of the liver. Long-term outcomes for the procedure have been excellent.

UCLA's expertise in liver transplantation extends to post-transplant care and adjuvant therapy. The UCLA program is at the forefront of clinical research, offering patients access to the latest advancements in immunosuppressive therapy as well as treatments for liver-transplant complications.



Expert Team

Patients in the UCLA Asian Liver Program receive the care of some of the finest and most experienced hepatologists, surgeons, diagnostic and interventional radiologists and surgical-critical-care specialists in the country. The nursing staff and other caregivers in the patient ward and Intensive Care Unit have experience in caring for patients with liver disease that far exceeds what can be found in most other centers.

Research

UCLA is a leading center of treatment innovation and laboratory research in liver

disease. The Asian Liver Program is at the forefront of clinical research, evaluating new, state-of-the-art medications for viral hepatitis B and C. Appropriate patients may be eligible to receive these investigational drugs as part of a clinical study. UCLA researchers are currently involved in investigations in the areas of liver cancer, ischemia-reperfusion injury (damage caused by the return of blood flow to tissue in which the blood supply has been restricted) and transplant immunology. The goal of this basic-science research is to transfer knowledge gained in the laboratory into leading-edge therapies at patient bedsides.

Our Program

The UCLA Asian Liver Program was established as part of the Pflieger Liver Institute at UCLA to extend the wealth of resources available at one of the world's premier liver-disease treatment centers to a community that can greatly benefit from its expertise. Seeking to overcome traditional barriers that prevent Asian patients – particularly recent immigrants – from seeking screening or treatment, the UCLA Asian Liver Program is committed to serving the community by remaining sensitive to its culture. UCLA physicians also work to coordinate care with the patient's own referring primary-care physician.

Mission Statement

The UCLA Asian Liver Program was created to deliver the best medical and surgical care through a multidisciplinary team approach and to provide leading-edge treatments for diseases of the liver in the Asian-American population.

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