Testing Information- *Hepatitis C*

Understanding your test results

There are several blood tests to diagnose hepatitis C and other diagnostic tests to determine the condition of your liver. Some blood tests are not 100% accurate so your clinician may order a combination of tests. Some tests detect antibodies (a protein generated by the body to fight disease) and others detect virus.

Antibody Tests

The first blood test usually done to look for hepatitis C is an antibody test (anti-HCV). A positive anti-HCV result should be verified with a second more accurate test called RIBA ((Recombinant Immunoblot Assay) because anti-HCV tests may produce false positive results. A false positive result means the laboratory test looks positive but is truly not. This happens more often in persons who have a low risk for the disease for which they are being tested.

Antibody tests for hepatitis C (anti-HCV and RIBA) do not indicate whether the infection is new (acute), chronic, or a past (resolved) infection.

PCR

A PCR (polymerase chain reaction) is a test that detects hepatitis C virus in the blood. PCR tests are used to verify other hepatitis C test results, determine the status of the infection, and to monitor treatment. A positive PCR test means you are currently infected with hepatitis C. Please note: a single negative PCR test does not mean you do not have hepatitis C. Sometime the virus level may be too low for the test to detect it in the blood. If your clinician thinks you have hepatitis C, the PCR test should be repeated.

Genotype

Genotype refers to the particular type of hepatitis C. It can be determined from a blood test. There are at least six genotypes of hepatitis C. Most people (75%) in the U.S. have genotype 1. Genotypes 2 and 3 are the next most common. If you are infected with one genotype, it is possible to become infected with another type. Genotyping is important for treatment purposes. It will help determine how you may respond to treatment.

Liver Function Tests

Liver function tests (LFTs) measure the levels of enzymes and other substances in your liver. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, certain enzymes will be released or the level of some substances will change.

Liver Ultrasound/Sonogram

An ultrasound or sonogram test uses sound waves to check for liver abnormalities and to check if liver damage is affecting surrounding organs.

Liver Biopsy

A liver biopsy entails the clinician inserting a special needle into the liver and removing a small piece of liver tissue to check for inflammation and scarring. A liver biopsy measures the severity of liver damage. The results allow the doctor to determine if and when treatment may be needed and what type of treatment to use. Biopsy results can also help determine how well a treatment is working.