

December 9, 2023

Paolo Angeli, MD  
Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Hepatology*

Dear Dr. Angeli,

We are submitting our manuscript entitled **“Preoperative Hepatology and Primary Care Visits Improve Postoperative Outcomes in Patients with Cirrhosis: a National Cohort Study”** for consideration of publication as an original article in *Journal of Hepatology*.

Patients with cirrhosis have increased risk of postoperative mortality relative to the general population, however there are limited data regarding effective preoperative measures to mitigate this risk. We aimed to evaluate whether preoperative primary care physician (PCP) and/or Gastroenterology/Hepatology (GI/Hep) visits may improve postoperative outcomes in patients with cirrhosis undergoing major surgery. Using national data from the Veterans Health Administration, we conducted a propensity-matched cohort study comparing 1982 patients with preoperative PCP and/or GI/Hep visits to 1846 patients with no preoperative visits. Using survival analysis, we demonstrated a 45% reduction in the hazard of postoperative mortality in patients completing preoperative visits with both PCP and GI/Hep visits relative to patients with no preoperative visits; a smaller effect but statistically significant was effect was also observed in patients with preoperative visits with PCP alone or GI/Hep alone. To explore mediators of this effect, we found that patients with preoperative visits were more likely to have diuretics, spontaneous bacterial peritonitis prophylaxis, and hepatic encephalopathy medications either newly initiated or dose adjusted prior to surgery, and were more likely to receive preoperative paracentesis. Importantly, we also demonstrated that preoperative visits were associated with reductions in absolute risk of postoperative mortality relative to predictions of the VOCAL-Penn Score, highlighting this measure as a potential modifiable risk factor to minimize perioperative risk and potentially improve surgical candidacy for selected patients. Our work also identifies a potential synergistic effect with PCP and GI/Hep preoperative visits and underscores the importance of multidisciplinary care in preoperative optimization.

Given the rising incidence of cirrhosis and associated surgeries in these patients, we believe this manuscript would be of great interest to the readership of *Journal of Hepatology*. This manuscript is original and has not been submitted to other journals. Thank you kindly for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bachir Ghandour, MD  
Department of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania  
3400 Civic Center Blvd  
Philadelphia, PA 19104



Nadim Mahmud, MD MS MPH MSCE (**corresponding**)  
Division of Gastroenterology, University of Pennsylvania  
3400 Civic Center Blvd  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Email: [nadim@penmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:nadim@penmedicine.upenn.edu)  
Telephone: +1-215-349-822