PARTNERING FOR ™
CURE

DR VALENTINA SVICHER

AVIRALIA Foundation, Italy

Valentina Svicher is a research scientist working in collaboration with Aviralia Foundation and the University of Rome Tor Vergata. Her work is dedicated to the investigation of structural and biological modifications of hepatitis B virus (HBV) proteins at different stages of disease progression.

Born in Rome, she began her career in medical research following graduation from Sapienza University in 2001, with a degree in biological science. Following this, she continued her academic study gaining a PhD in microbiology from the University of Rome Tor Vergata in 2006, before accepting a full-time position there as a clinical virology researcher.

To date, Valentina has authored or co-authored over 250 scientific publications and her research has been awarded numerous accolades, including award "GB Rossi" for the best article published in 2007 and 'best oral presentation' at the 2011 Italian Conference on AIDS and Retroviruses (ICAR).

In her present role at the university, she is working on a research project to examine HBV reactivation. This is defined as an abrupt increase in HBV replication in a patient with inactive or resolved hepatitis B under conditions of immunosuppression. This area of study is particularly important, in terms of developing HBV cures, since understanding how the virus reactivates can also provide information on how the virus establishes a persistent infection thus interfering with achieving a cure. In addition, the use of immune suppression agents in standard care is increasing, resulting in the number of HBV reactivation cases similarly increasing. This reactivation can lead to liver damage in patients, and even death.

The *Partnering for Cure* funding, provided by Bristol-Myers Squibb, has enabled Valentina and her team to focus on identifying the genetic characteristics of HBV in patients receiving immune suppressive therapy. Additionally the funding is also being used to study genome sequencing of the entire hepatitis B virus, which it is hoped will identify the genetic variability of the virus.

It is anticipated that this genetic analysis will be completed by January 2015, while the analysis of *in vitro* mutations will be completed by the end of 2015. Early first results have indicated that the virus shown in patients with HBV activation is more aggressive and pathogenic, which is useful in terms of determining the appropriate clinical approach for treating patients.

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