Good Vibrations

May 1, 2015 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The bad news: None of us is getting any younger. As we age, we increasingly spend time and money on our health care. The good news: Getting older, for many of us, means getting wiser. We learn what matters most to us, which helps us prioritize.

That's what happened to our cover guy, Jack Berlin. The 60-year-old founder of a software company got hepatitis C virus (HCV) from a blood transfusion in 1976. Busy being a family man and succeeding in his career, he didn't prioritize hep C at first. He was in relatively good health otherwise, and his HCV treatment choices were limited.

Berlin finally decided to deal with his hep C in 2003. He endured a 48-week course of weekly interferon shots and daily ribavirin pills. He lost 40 pounds as a result of the flu-like side effects of interferon. Sadly, after all he went through, the treatment didn't work. He went back to living his life, waiting for better treatment options.

He tried again in 2011 after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Incivek (telaprevir) and Victrelis (boceprevir), the first drugs to directly attack HCV. Each drug shortened treatment times and raised cure rates, but both still had to be used along with interferon and ribavirin. He had the same side effects, but this time he was cured.

Berlin had found out about his hep C after donating blood in the early 1980s. Although he postponed treatment initially, knowing his HCV status gave him the opportunity to keep himself healthy in the meantime. Unfortunately, too many baby boomers—a key demographic group at high risk for hep C—remain unaware of their HCV status.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all people born between 1945 and 1965 get a one-time screening for hep C. Baby boomers are five times more likely to have HCV than other adults, making up as much as 75 percent of the country's estimated 3.2 million hep C cases. As many as half of all HCV-positive boomers do not know they have the virus.

Baby boomers are not the only ones who should get tested for hep C. In this issue, find out about the eight major HCV risk factors and other HCV basics, such as how the virus is transmitted and how HCV can be prevented. Last but not least, also get the basic facts about modern hep C treatment, which is easier and shorter than ever before.

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