We Are the Champions

December 5, 2014 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Advocating for your rights—and especially the rights of others—isn't easy. It often requires many of us to get out of our comfort zones. It sometimes means we have to stand up to the powers that be with no guarantee of success. This uncertainty keeps some of us on the sidelines, even when we have skin in the game. Sticking your neck out can be risky, but the rewards can make it worthwhile.

Taking all of the above into account, it's no wonder many of us admire the efforts of advocates. They take risks and sometimes reap rewards. Even when they lose a battle, they stay focused on winning the war. In recognition of their advocacy for people living with the hepatitis C virus (HCV), I'm honored to introduce the HEP 10. These 10 men and women are longtime HCV advocates.

In alphabetical order, they are: Orlando Chavez of the Oasis Clinic, Ryan Clary of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, Alan Franciscus of the Hepatitis C Support Project, Jules Levin of the National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project, Heather Lusk of The CHOW Project and Hep Free Hawaii, Michael Ninburg of the Hepatitis Education Project, Lorren Sandt of the Caring Ambassadors Program, Gloria Searson of COPE, Susie Simon of the Hepatitis C Association, and Nancy Steinfurth of the Hep C Connection.

No list is ever definitive, but we believe these folks possess the skills needed by successful advocates. Alan Franciscus is a wonderful example, which is why he graces our cover. After his HCV diganosis in 1996, Alan realized there was a lack of education on the virus among the general public, as well as among health care providers. He launched hcvadvocate.org to address those concerns. Although he's now cured, Alan continues his hep C advocacy. We thank Alan and the other advocates on our list for their efforts. Click here to read more about the HEP 10.

The power to advocate, however, doesn't just belong to a select few. Self-empowerment is essential for each of us to maximize our own health and wellness. If you or a loved one is living with HCV, the more you know about the virus, the better the outcomes of treatment. This is a great place to start.

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