28 August: I am serial killer in a microscopic world

August 28, 2015 By David Pieper

Viral load is the number of viral particles floating in the blood. These are copies of the genetic material of the virus circulating through the body. This is usually expressed as the number of International Units (UI) that you have in 1ml of blood. The amount of hep C genetic material found in your blood corresponds to that many hep C viruses. Anything over 800,000 IU/mL is usually considered high. At the commencement of treatment my viral load was 3,100,000. After just seven days on treatment my viral load has dropped to 45. Not 45,000, just 45 copies.

My liver functions (AST and ALT) are also back in the normal range. I know not to take too much notice of liver function tests as these can go up and down but I am happy to be back in normal range. So I guess my liver is functioning normally.

These drugs are good. On the old interferon-based treatment, you'd hope to be undetectable at 12 weeks. If you were very lucky it might happen at four weeks. In my first round of treatment I was undetectable at four weeks. In my second round of treatment it took 12 weeks to become undetectable. It's not a competition but I was disappointed in myself in the later result. Similarly when the virus recurred at the end of treatment, I felt like I had failed. What a cruel twist of fate it is, to undertake treatment, become undetectable, stick to all the rules, and still feel like a failure.

But with just 45 copies of the hep C virus in my blood, I could almost name them and then set about hunting them down and killing them, one by one. I see myself as a serial killer in a microscopic world, with an arsenal of deadly weapons from the labs of big Pharma. Every viral load test is newspaper headline, showing how few there are left alive. Watch out boys, your days are numbered!

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