7 January 2015: Saturday night fever

January 7, 2016 By David Pieper

After the pre -Christmas good news about PBS access to Direct Acting Antivirals in Australia, I was pleased to take a break from what has been two solid years of campaigning to get to that point. Some of the finer details are still to be worked out but it is clear all Australians with hep C will be able to access treatment with *Harvoni* or *sofosbuvir* and *daclatasvir* from March 2016. There is no information yet on the availability of *Viekira Pak*.

Enjoying the New Year's Eve surrounded by friends in Australia's sub-tropical rainforest, hepatitis C was the furthest thought from my mind, but less than a day later I was beginning to think it would be on my mind for quite a bit longer. I had a fever. I felt freezing cold, although my body was so overheated it was like I was cooking up a casserole of internal organs. My head was pounding so hard from the heat; I felt like I was in a 1960s sci-fi movie. My skin was so sensitive I couldn't bear to be touched, and I ached all over.

Several days and nights passed with me in the haze of the fever, by which time I had convinced myself I was undergoing a sero-conversion illness caused by viral rebound. I will never forget the fever I had when I seroconverted for hep C in 2002, although I didn't know what it was at the time. The fever was exactly the same as that which I was experiencing now.

A hundred thoughts passed through my mind. What would I tell my clinician? Should I go back on treatment straight away? Does this mean other treatments won't work on me as well? Will I cause the whole study I am part of, to fail?

I arranged to attend the clinic on my first day back home. My bloods are usually sent to a lab in Singapore because I am on an international trail, but the nurse realised I was really worried about this and takes extra blood to send for an urgent test at a local lab. The hours tick by and I try to keep myself busy so I don't have to think about it.

Finally at 4:30pm, a message: My ALT is 17, which is in the normal range. It's a good sign but I will have to wait a week for the viral load to come back.

This is what it's like to constantly live with the fear that hep C might come back. This is why it is we must embrace SVR as a cure, because nobody needs to live their life in fear.

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