9 November 2015: Is SVR a cure?

November 9, 2015 By David Pieper

My treatment finished last week and I am waiting to find out if I am cured.

The American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and the Infectious Diseases Society of America state that: “Successful hepatitis C treatment results in sustained virologic response (SVR), which is tantamount to virologic cure”. Despite this, I often encounter people with lived experience of hepatitis C, who still refuse to accept that SVR equals a cure.

Once I am cured my viral load becomes permanently undetectable. Having an undetectable viral load actually means it is beneath the level of detection. It could be zero or it could be a very small amount which can’t be detected with current technology. Either way, the virus is unable to replicate, which is why it is called a “cure”. Also, it is impossible for me to transmit the virus to my partner or anyone else when my viral load is undetectable.

Of course, after clearing the hep C virus I will always be antibody positive. This does not mean the virus is present, it means I have the antibodies against it in the same way I have antibodies against the flu once I have had it. I often hear of people who are confused or alarmed when they a full blood test shows they are hep C antibody positive, years after clearing the virus. I know being antibody positive will preclude me from donating blood for the rest of my life. And when I die my organs will be considered unsuitable for transplant, except to people who have hep C. These things are discriminatory and need serious attention, and soon.

But as individuals in the affected communities, I believe it is our responsibility to grasp the new reality of a cure with both hands and celebrate it. There are so many “war stories” about the old hep C treatment, so many people who still believe hepatitis C is a death sentence. People who have lived with hep C for most of their lives find it hard enough to accept it has gone once they are cured, without anyone putting further doubt in their mind. Hepatitis C is curable and treatment has changed. We need to embrace it and spread the good news to the darkest corners where fear and ignorance thrive.

For now all I can say is I’m finished treatment and I’m waiting for SVR.

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