Act Now to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis

March 14, 2016 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

This week's Hep On the Hill event was amazing. More than 120 advocates from 27 states met with over 100 members of Congress. Folks flew in from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. Three HEP bloggers were there: Karen Hoyt, Kim Bossley, and myself. I wish every single person with hepatitis C (and B) could have witnessed this event. If so, you would see you are not alone. People care, and are working their hardest to secure funding for improved services with the goal of eliminating hepatitis C.

I discussed Hep on the Hill in my last blog. The purpose of this event is to ask for an increase in the federal response to the viral hepatitis epidemic in the United States. Briefly summarized, Hep on the Hill is an opportunity for viral hepatitis advocates to educate members of Congress, and to ask them to support funding for viral hepatitis programs.

We will get nowhere without your help. The more people who call their legislators, the better. You may think that your voice doesn't matter, but it does. Each call, email, letter, fax, and visit is important. The more people in a district or state who tell their legislators what they want, the more likely the issue will gain traction. Remember, in terms of money, we aren't asking for much. But in non-monetary terms, we are saving lives.

Here is what you can do TODAY:

- Call your Congressional Representative through the Congressional Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Ask to be connected to your Representative. If you aren't sure who your elected officials are, they are listed at congress.gov.
- Once you are connected to the office, ask to speak to the staff person who handles health care issues. Whether you speak to that person live or leave a voicemail, tell them:
  - Your name
  - That you are a constituent from (your town/city and state)
  - That you would like the Representative to support an increase in funding at the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis to $62.8 million in FY2017. (This is more than what President

Obama is asking for, but about 100 million short of what we actually need.)

- Also, ask the legislator to support repeal of the federal funding ban on syringe exchange services. (Currently this issue is attracting bi-partisan support and a nudge from constituents may help this pass.)
- Give a brief message of why this issue is important to you (You have it, someone you know has it, you are concerned about your community, or however you are touched by viral hepatitis)

Then repeat the entire process for both of your senators.

Then sit back and feel good about yourself. If you want to do a tiny bit more, ask others to do this too. Extra bonus points if you post to social media, mention your legislator and #FundHep.

For more information about how to support efforts to improve viral hepatitis funding and services, visit National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable or the Hepatitis Appropriations Partnership.

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