An Old Hepatitis C Medicine: Humor

April 1, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

When I was diagnosed with hepatitis C, I added humor to my daily health regimen. If I was going to be yellow, at least I could laugh it. Yellow looks terrible on me, but smiling looks good on me and everyone. Today's blog is in honor of April Fool's Day, my favorite unofficial holiday.

Humor is more than a laughing matter. William Fry, M.D., professor emeritus in psychiatry at Stanford University Medical School, spent much of his career researching the physiological benefits of humor. Fry discovered that laughter changes brain patterns, stimulates the immune system, and reduces stress hormones. Laughter also reduces pain perception.

There have been many books written on the relationship of health and humor. In *Anatomy of an Illness*, Norman Cousins describes his two brushes with death, which he confronted with great levity. Cousins surrounded himself with humor, convinced of the healing power of laughter. Later, as an advocate of humor, Cousins required his hospital staff to learn and tell a new joke every day.

Humor is all around us. In medicine, there are websites, seminars, the *Journal of Jocularity*, and an annual conference called the Humor Project. Naturally, humor needs to be used judiciously. There is an appropriate time for laughter, just as there is a time for tears. Only you can be the judge of that. However, if mirth is noticeably absent in your life, you might want to add reading humor blogs or watching "I Love Lucy" reruns to your health maintenance regimen.

As for hepatitis C, I highly recommend attending a support group or finding one on the Web. The group I attended always cheered me up. Surrounded by others with the same disease, we were more relaxed and more likely to see the humorous side of this challenging condition. Besides, where else can you learn about "Reberettes" - a termed coined by a patient undergoing treatment (a Tourettes-like* syndrome induced by ribavirin).

It is my completely unscientific opinion that laughter separates humans from most of the animal world. Perhaps humor is an evolutionary device to help us maintain our physical and mental health. My belief is well summarized by the words of James Thurber, "Humor is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest and earliest natural resources which must be preserved at all costs."

*My apologies to anyone with Tourettes Syndrome. My intention is not to poke fun of Tourettes--it is meant to lighten the

load for those taking hepatitis C medications.

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