Arrested for Hepatitis? It Could Happen

April 30, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

If you are trying to keep your blood pressure from rising, I suggest you skip today's blog. The contents are unsettling, to say the least. In "Transmitting HIV Is a Crime in Most States. Is HCV Next?" by Sony Salzman (Medpage Today, April 22, 2018), I read about attempts to criminalize viral hepatitis.

Salzman reports that some states are trying to expand or pass laws making it illegal for people with hepatitis B or C to have sex without their partner's knowledge of the individual's viral hepatitis status. The law stands even if a condom is used. In short, in the eyes of the law, bodily fluids many be a deadly weapon if you have an infectious disease. According to Salzman, at least 12 states criminalize viral hepatitis; doctors could be compelled to testify against their own patients.

Criminalization of diseases is not a new thing; it stretches back to early biblical ages. In modern times, the most recent precedence criminalizing a disease occurred during the darkest days of HIV and AIDS-related tragedies. We continue to punish people with diseases. Prisons are filled with people with untreated mental illness and addictions.

It's time to act. We need to increase awareness about the issues surrounding viral hepatitis. Tomorrow is the beginning of Hepatitis Awareness Month. We focus on increasing public awareness about viral hepatitis in the United States for the entire month of May. Stay tuned to my blog, Hep and other hepatitis-related organizations to find out what you can do. Together, we can make a difference.

I'd love to hear what you are doing for Hepatitis Awareness Month. Please send comments.

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