The Brave and the Cowardly: Celebrities and Hepatitis C

June 28, 2016 By Greg Jefferys

There was a post today in a Facebook Group that I am a member of, this post provided a link to a Wiki site that listed a fair number of "celebrities"... famous people, who are known to have or to have had Hep C.

Of those listed some brave and noble people have "come out" and made it known that they have or had Hep C thus supporting the broader Hep C community by creating public awareness of the disease.

With others it was only known that they had Hep C after they died. Some even kept their infection with Hep C secret after their death, such is the absurd stigma associated with Hepatitis C.

For example when Lou Reed died in 2013 no one initially mentioned Hep C, it was a "liver disease" or liver cancer. Eventually the truth came out. Sadly Lou Reed's Hep C and liver disease was too advanced to be treated with DAAs when they became available.

Yet until he died no one knew that Lou had Hep C. For a man that was open about his drug use and other life style activities it seems strange that he bothered to hide the fact that he had Hep C. Maybe it was his spin doctors or his record company?

Lou Reed had Hep C when the huge debate about access to affordable Hep C treatments was in full flight yet Lou remained silent.

How much better it would have been if he had ignored "the stigma" and spoken out. How many people might have benefited from such an act?

The same with David Bowie, his official sites and Wikipedia simple state that he died of liver cancer but this quote from a newspaper piece on Bowie puts it pretty straight:

If Bowie died of liver cancer, then he hasn't died of a common disease; he died of a rare one, even if it is overly represented in the rock'n'roll hall of deathly fame.

Those with an ear for rock trivia might recall that Lou Reed – whose '70s collaborations with Bowie resulted in Reed's epochal Transformer album, among other gems – was also a victim of liver cancer when he died in October 2013.

In both cases, their liver cancer will have almost certainly been caused by the Hepatitis C virus, which has been running rampant through drug-injecting communities since the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Lots of people are pretty cagey about how they contracted the disease, and some will have picked it up from blood transfusions before Australian authorities began screening for the virus in 1992.

Even so, there is no debate about the main method of transmission: injecting drug users sharing needles.

The reality is that if you hear of a celebrity who has died of a liver disease or liver cancer the chances are very high that they actually died of Hep C.

Of course that has changed now and the new batch of celebrities, whether in Music or Film or the art world, can all afford to treat their Hep C with DAAs and so never have to admit that they have had Hep C. Safe in their shroud of secrecy.

And don't think that it is only famous people from the entertainment and art worlds that have Hep C and stay silent. It is across all society and where wealth and privilege and excess exists so to is Hep C existing in larger proportions than the normal population.

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