Coming Out of the Shadows of Hepatitis C

March 4, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

There are moments when it feels like my heart and liver can't take much more hepatitis C angst. When I hear stories about how hepatitis C patients have been stigmatized, I just want to crawl under the covers with a bowl of cheese doodles. Worse yet, is when stigmatization occurs at the hands of medical professionals. Lack of compassion from health care providers makes my fury rise up like a bucket of bile.

In *6 Minutes of Interesting Stuff for Doctors Today*, Jacob George, Professor of Medicine and leading liver specialist at Sydney University in Australia, reported that fear of stigmatization is preventing many hepatitis C patients from seeking the care they need. Patients are afraid to seek treatment, or even get diagnosed. Similar reports have surfaced in the U.S.

How has this happened? What have we done to make it so hard for patients to get help? These are useless questions. It is much better to ask, what can we do to change this? President Bill Clinton said, "Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shames us all." The same can be said about stigma related to hepatitis C.

It is time to stop whispering hepatitis C. Let's shout, "I have hepatitis C and I am not going to be quiet anymore." Perhaps our scared brothers and sister will hear us, and come out from the shadows of stigmatization, and get the care they need.

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