Eliminating Viral Hepatitis in My Lifetime

October 24, 2016 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Four major liver organizations issued a joint statement in the October 2016 issue of Hepatology, calling for the elimination of viral hepatitis. The organizations are the Latin American Association for the Study of the Liver, the European Association for the Study of the Liver, the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver, and the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease. These societies add their names to the list of other organizations calling for an end to viral hepatitis, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Hepatitis Alliance. WHO has set a goal to eliminate the threat of viral hepatitis by 2030.

Think about this for a moment. When I was infected with hepatitis C in 1988, the virus didn't even have a name, let alone a cure. If we can reduce the threat of hepatitis B and C by 2030, and assuming I live that long, this means I may be able to retire from hepatitis advocacy work. Wouldn't that be nice!

The rationale for this joint statement:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as many as 400 million people worldwide are living with chronic hepatitis viral infection.
- More than one million people die of cirrhosis, mostly caused by viral hepatitis.
- More than 500,000 people die every year from hepatocellular carcinoma (the most common form of liver cancer). It is the third leading cause of cancer deaths.
- Vaccination makes hepatitis B preventable. Chronic hepatitis B infection is manageable, especially with early diagnosis and intervention.
- Hepatitis C is curable. In order to prevent cirrhosis, early diagnosis and intervention is key.

With all the news in the world, it cheers me up to think of a world without hepatitis C.

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