Finding Out You Have Hepatitis C

October 27, 2014 By John Rickman

My name is John Rickman and back in August of 2012 at the age of 55, I checked into a drug rehab center in Boca Raton, FL for addiction to prescription pain killers (my struggles with prescription pain killers will be another blog). A routine blood scan was performed to check the level of opiates in my system along with testing for various other constituents. One of the parameters checked for was hepatitis C. The result came back positive for Genotype 1 hepatitis C. My highest viral load, which is a measure of the virus in your blood, was over 4,800,000 IU/ml (international units per milliliter).

I was under the impression you could only get this disease from sharing needles, blood transfusion, etc. As these means of transmission did not relate to me, I asked the doctor how I could have gotten the disease. He asked if I had ever inhaled cocaine. Which I had in the late 80's and early 90's. I was informed the disease could be transmitted this way also. Damn the Luck!

Fast forward to March 2014. I had decided to seek treatment for my Hepatitis C while I had no outward symptoms. Based upon when I last used cocaine, I had already had this disease for 20 plus years! I've sinced learned this is why it's called the "silent killer". It can potentially take decades for symptoms to manifest all the time the disease is doing damage to your liver with possible cirrhosis and/or liver cancer the eventual outcome.

I completed the 12 week protocol for hepatitis C on June 19, 2014. I am waiting on the blood work performed on June 19th to see if I am still non detect on the viral load in my blood and negative for the hepatitis C virus. I was already non detect and negative after the first month. My course of treatment was weekly injections of Pegylated interferon along with twice daily doses of ribavirin (400 mg in the morning and 600 mg in the evening) and a once daily dose of sofosbuvir (trade name sovaldi).

It is the addition of the relatively new treatment drug Sovaldi (FDA approved in December 2013) that has decreased the amount of time now necessary for treatment of Hepatitis C. However, sovaldi does not come cheap. $1,000 per pill and you take these everyday for 84 days!

That's $84,000 along with the cost of the Pegylated interferon and ribavirin. And some insurance companies will not cover the cost of hepatitis C treatment. My insurance was one of those. I was/am not a wealthy man so I thought I was not going to be able to get the Hepatitis C treatment.

However, my doctors at Liver Consultants of Texas found and put me in contact with support programs that in the end, paid for all three of my treatment drugs! My only out of pocket was the monthly $20 co-pay and gas for the approx. 40 mile round trip to see my doctor in Dallas TX. I had

blood drawn every week to ensure I was ok at an independent lab as these drugs do have some side effects, but my insurance paid for 100% of the testing.

You are considered technically “cured” if you are non-detect for the virus after 6 months. Which for me, will be in mid-September 2014. This blog will chronicle my next 3 months of recovery while I wait to see if I’m still “clean” in September. In the next 3 months I will be working to get into better shape by exercising and eating better and I will put down how I’m feeling because as I stated earlier...these drugs do take a toll on your body while working to eliminate the HCV virus. I will begin there, with the side effects I experienced in the 3 months I was taking the Hepatitis C protocol.

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