Freedom From Hepatitis C

July 3, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Tomorrow the U.S. celebrates Independence Day. The July 4th holiday doesn't celebrate our actual freedom from colonization under the British Empire. The date commemorates our declaration to be a new nation. However, we had to fight for that freedom, and the American Revolutionary War did not end until 1983.

And so it goes with hepatitis C. There is a cure for this viral infection, We know how to prevent it's transmission. But the war continues. We seem to be a long way off from eliminating this curable disease. We have to fight for freedom.

Recently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released their 2015 surveillance data. Here are a few key points:

- The number of reported cases of acute hepatitis C infection has risen annually since 2010.
- The increase in acute hepatitis C cases is associated with rising rates of injection drug use, and, to a much lesser extent, improved hep C detection.
- New hepatitis C infections occur mostly among young whites who live in non-urban areas, particularly within the Appalachian, Midwestern, and New England regions of the country.
- The CDC estimates that roughly 3.5 million people are currently infected with hepatitis C.
- In 2013, hepatitis C-related deaths began to exceed the combined number of deaths with 60 other infectious diseases. However, in 2015 the annual death rate decreased 0.2 percent to 19,629.
- Approximately one-half of all hepatitis C-related deaths in 2015 occurred among 55-64 year-olds.

Hepatitis C-related deaths are largely underestimated. The CDC states, "The only large U.S. study of deaths among persons with confirmed HCV infection indicated that only 19 percent had HCV listed anywhere on the death certificate despite 75 percent having evidence of substantial liver disease." Some experts believe that the number of people with hepatitis C is closer to 7 million or more. I've looked at various analyses, and I believe the number is much, much higher than 3.5

million people.

Freedom from hepatitis C begins with good data collection. It ends when everyone is treated and no new infections occur. Like the American Revolution, we seem to be engaged in a long battle for freedom.

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