Hepatitis Awareness and Delusions

May 1, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Hepatitis Awareness Month is observed in May. I believe that we can all make a difference. Although I am an optimist, sometimes my optimism is borderline delusional thinking. For instance, in the mid-1990's, I was certain that people would wake up and see how potentially serious and BIG the threat of hepatitis C was. Hah!

When the new, effective, low-side effect hepatitis C treatments came out, I thought that we'd drastically reduce the number of hepatitis C cases we have in the United States. I never dreamed we'd be engaged in a huge, scandalous battle over the price of treatment versus the lives of patients.

My grandest delusion is the belief that when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended hepatitis C testing for everyone born from 1945 through 1965, that millions of baby boomers would finally know that they have hepatitis C, a disease that is treatable. Double-Hah!

In an interview with Monique Foster, MD, MPH, EIS officer of the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis, although hepatitis C infection awareness is increasing, it seems to be doing it slowly. The CDC examined the annual National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). This survey employs a bus that goes all over the US, collecting information and blood samples from about 5,000 people.

In 2001 to 2006, about 50 percent of people were aware that they were infected with hepatitis C prior to examination by the National Health and Nutrition Survey. That increased to 59 percent from 2007 to 2012. Looking at hepatitis C treatment, about 7 percent completed hep C treatment from 2001 to 2006. That increased to 22 percent from 2007 to 2012.

Now that hepatitis C treatment is shorter, easier to take, and more effective, I am optimistic that the next NHANES data will show a rise in the number of people who were treated. And with all the advertisements for hep C treatment, perhaps we'll see an increase in the number of people who are aware of their hep C status.

No Hah! here. I am hanging on to my optimism. Perhaps you will join me in my sea of optimism by trying to raise awareness about viral hepatitis?

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