Hepatitis C Advocacy: Hepatitis on the Hill

March 9, 2015 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

I am in Washington, D.C. for Hep on the Hill. This annual event focuses on hepatitis B and C federal policy issues. The goal is to increase the federal response to the viral hepatitis epidemic in the United States. The major hepatitis C advocacy groups are attending, and the folks at Hep are committed to getting the word out. The Hepatitis Appropriations Partnership (HAP), Hep B United and the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) are organizing this. The National Alliance of States and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) made it possible for me to attend, so a big shout out to them.

This is a two-day event. Today I am learning how to be a more effective advocate. I am networking with other hepatitis advocates, hoping to fortify our common resolve to increase awareness and funding for issues relating to viral hepatitis.

Tomorrow, we'll be on Capitol Hill, visiting the offices of our senators and representatives. We will educate their staff on the experiences of people living with hepatitis B and C. More importantly, we will ask for increased leadership and resources to address the viral hepatitis epidemic in the United States.

Hepatitis C is killing more Americans every year than HIV is, but dollar for dollar, hepatitis C funding is pennies compared to HIV's funding. State health departments receive less than $1 in federal funding for every person living with viral hepatitis for the Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator program. In the meantime, hepatitis C infection and death rates continue to rise.

There has never been a greater need, or a greater opportunity to make a difference than now. Two recent events occurred that give me cause for hope:

- President Obama's budgetary request for the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis was double that of previous budgets, and
- Congressman Brett Guthrie (R-KY), Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA), Congressman Charlie Dent (R-PA), and Congressman Hank Johnson (D-GA) joined together to introduce H.R. 1101, the Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2015.

You can help! Act now by asking your Congressional Representative to cosponsor and/or support H.R. 1101, the Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2015. To determine who your Representative is, go to www.house.gov and type in your zip code. You can find the phone number there or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

Ask to speak to the staff person who handles health care issues. Whether you speak to that person live or leave a message, tell him/her:
"My name is _____ and I live in (city/state). I would like Congressman/Congresswoman _____ to cosponsor H.R. 1101, the Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2015. This bill would authorize badly needed funding for hepatitis B and C testing and linkage to care services. Make sure you are personal when delivering your message. Explain why this legislation is important to you.

We need every single one of you to act now. Don’t wait another minute. People are dying from hepatitis C, and maybe, just maybe, we can save some lives.

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