Hepatitis C and Brain Fog

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The hepatitis C symptom that was the most difficult for me to handle was neurocognitve dysfunction, commonly referred to as *brain fog*. Not being able to think is exasperating, and if I thought it would help, I'd bang my head against a wall to dislodge my thoughts. Instead, I savor a cup of fully caffeinated coffee without a single drop of regret, since research shows it improves brain performance. Additionally, coffee may be quite liver-friendly when it comes to lowering liver disease progression.

Back to brain fog. One frustrating aspect of cognitive dysfunction is that I am not sure if some or all of my problem is caused by hepatitis C. Memory problems and aging are so commonly associated, that there are oodles of jokes about them, although right now I can't recall any. Poor or insufficient sleep can mess up our thinking ability. So can stress, inadequate exercise, and a host of other factors.

Then I saw this article: Improvement of Neurocognitive Function in Responders to an Antiviral Therapy for Chronic Hepatitis C, research by Kraus MR, et al.(Published in Hepatology Advanced online publication January 2013; Issue 1) This research sought to measure neurocognitve function in hepatitis C patients who completed antiviral therapy with peginterferon and ribavirin. This multicenter study followed 168 subjects for a year after completing treatment.

Compared to non-responders, patients with a sustained response to treatment performed significantly better on neurocognitive tests. In short, successful elimination of hepatitis C is associated with improved neurocognitive function. These results made me pick up the phone and look for a hepatitis C clinical trial.

A year later, now free of hepatitis C, I can't say that my brain is any better than it was before. The only difference is I don't have hepatitis C to blame. My hepatitis C-negative friends seem to be just as forgetful as I am. We are able to carry on full conversations without being able to recall a single name or title of a book or movie, and yet we understand each other perfectly. If I am desperate enough, there is always Google. In short, I've acquired a new amazing skill--the ability to communicate despite memory problems.

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