Hepatitis C and Occam's Razor

August 31, 2015 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Recently I had a bad headache, which is a rare occurrence for me. The last headache I had was in 2013 while I was on hepatitis C treatment. Since I wasn't on treatment now, the only obvious explanation for my pain was that I had a brain tumor. I took an acetaminophen, got a good night's sleep, and in the morning the headache was gone. Either the acetaminophen is a cure for brain tumors or I just had a 24-hour tumor.

Seriously, I didn't really think I had a tumor, but for a brief moment, the thought flashed through my mind. (It didn't help that I was reading *Do No Harm*, a book about brain tumors.) Fortunately, more rational thoughts followed, such as, "Take a Tylenol." But it left me wondering, why is it that we jump to worst case scenarios?

I know I am not the only one who does this. I am frequently contacted by hep C patients who wonder all sorts of things that seem far-fetched to me. Patients who are cured seem especially susceptible to worry. "I feel like I am coming down with something. Is the hep C coming back?" A patient who was cured three years ago got abnormal lab tests that could be caused by a jillion lifestyle causes, and she wondered if it was related to having hep C. Someone else wondered if his hep C was really undetectable after treatment, or if he was one of the extremely rare people who had a hidden infection.

My 24-hour tumor shows that I get this. However, I do think that there is a huge difference between obsessively entertaining worries, or just having passing ones. If you tend to worry about your health, here are some tips to try:

- Apply Occam's Razor to your problem. Occam's Razor states that among a series of potential explanations, the simple one is the most likely reason. For instance, if I am tired, is it hep C or is it because I didn't get 8 hours of sleep?
- Be patient, and wait for an explanation to emerge. My mentor at Stanford told me that when it came to his own health, he found that pretty much everything got better in about 2 weeks. If it wasn't a clear emergency, he'd wait 2 weeks before going to the doctor. I've applied that to my own health, and it's worked for me.
- Think about worst-case scenarios, and then ask, so what? What if hep C came back? What is the worst thing that would happen? We may be upset, but most of us can deal with this.

- Set parameters around worrying. If I have something that really bothers me, I invoke a rule: No worrying when I am trying to sleep or while I am driving. I allow myself to worry all I want when I am walking,
- Avoid Doctor Web. I can’t tell you how many diseases I have never had because I had all the symptoms that lined up with a disease I found on the Internet. These days I try to let my doctor do the diagnosing.
- Use humor. Sometimes a headache is just a headache, but why not also have a good laugh at my silly thinking. Sometimes a good laugh is all I need to keep my mind off my troubles.

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