Hepatitis C and World Hepatitis Day

July 26, 2013 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

I have lived with hepatitis C for more than 25 years. It was nearly ten years before I ever talked to another person who was also living with hepatitis C. In my insulated existence, it never occurred to me that I was just one among millions with this virus, and that hepatitis C was a global problem.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 130-170 million people have chronic hepatitis C, claiming more than 350,000 annual deaths. Add in hepatitis B, and the prevalence jumps to 500 million, a number far greater than HIV or any cancer.

Sharing a disease with 130-170 million people is simultaneously shocking and comforting. It is a horrifyingly high number, but with so many of us, the odds are in our favor that we will attract attention, research, and hopefully solutions. In fact, hepatitis C is potentially curable, which is a statement I could not make twenty years ago.

Although preventing the further transmission of hepatitis C is a critical task, so is screening those at risk. In the U.S., it is estimated that up to 75% of those with hepatitis C have yet to be diagnosed. Let me say this another way: There are millions of people who have hepatitis C who are unaware of this fact. In short, we need greater awareness.

To combat the problem of low awareness, the World Hepatitis Alliance initiated World Hepatitis Day. Launched in 2008, this annual event provides international focus for patient groups and people living with hepatitis B and C. World Hepatitis Day is an opportunity for interested groups and individuals to raise awareness and influence real change in disease prevention and access to testing and treatment.

World Hepatitis Day is July 28. For more information, check out World Hepatitis Day.

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