A Hepatitis C Awareness Message for Mothers and Grandmothers

May 7, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month, a time set aside to raise awareness about viral hepatitis in the U.S. Hepatitis C is the most common blood borne virus, and causes more annual deaths than HIV. Hepatitis C is a silent killer; the majority of those who are infected do not know they have it.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Prevention Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended hepatitis C screening for people born between 1945 and 1965. The CDC estimates that age-based screening will identify 800,000 Baby Boomers who might otherwise slip through the cracks if we only did risk-based hepatitis C testing. Furthermore, we may save 120,000 lives.

I have been mulling over the implications of age-based testing. Some of those who will test hepatitis C positive will be mothers and grandmothers, grey-haired women like me. Imagine learning that you have hepatitis C, long after your own daughters have had children. Put yourself in the shoes of a woman having to tell her children to get tested for hepatitis C, and if her daughter tests positive, her children may have hepatitis C.

It happens. Sadly, I know daughters who found out that they had hepatitis C when they were pregnant. They endured the usual prenatal fears with an added layer of worry--wondering if their baby would have hepatitis C.

The data vary, but approximately 40,000 women with hepatitis C give birth annually. Up to 4000 of these births will result in precious babies with hepatitis C. These figures are based on current data, in a time when new hepatitis C cases are relatively low compared to the 60's, 70's, and 80's. Granted, more men than women were contracting hepatitis C in the heyday of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll, but feminism pushed us out of our safety zones. Female Baby Boomers were confronted with new issues and opportunities, including new risks.

After the flowers have faded on Mother's Day, I urge everyone born from 1945-1965, along with those with risk factors for hepatitis C to get tested. We don't need to fear hepatitis C--there is treatment for it. If you test positive, find out about your options, and stay strong. Use your mighty mother strength to pave the way for future generations, and to create a world free from hepatitis C.

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