Hepatitis C Exposure: Oh No, Not Again!

February 18, 2019 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Some of us got hepatitis C a long time ago, perhaps decades ago. Many don't know the precise moment they were exposed to the hepatitis C virus (HCV), but knowing the risk factors, they have a good guess as to how they got it. There is a certain amount of freedom from not knowing the exact moment of exposure, because we are spared the mental anguish of wondering if we have hep C. It's no fun having HCV, but uncertainty has it's own patina of terror.

Awareness of exposure can be very distressing. Our brains take flight to worst case scenarios. "What if I have it? What will this do to my career, sex life, etc.? Will I die?" These worries are easier to bear now that we have good HCV treatment but still, who wants to go through that?

My hepatitis C was cured more than five years ago. Even when I had it, I was somewhat at ease with it since it isn't my nature to worry. Since being cured, I no longer work in patient care, so my risk for contracting hepatitis C again is pretty much zero. However, although despite my ease while living with hep C, I really, really don't want to ever get it again.

Yes, the treatment is easy, quick and effective (at least for me it was). But here is the thing I discovered now that I am cured: I constantly carried the fear that I could pass hepatitis C to someone else. I didn't realize how great that burden was until I was virus-free. I don't ever want to be in that position again.

So, if I am ever re-exposed, I won't be asking, "What if I have it? What will this do to my career, sex life, etc.? Will I die?" Instead, I'll ask, "Do I have it, and if so, how soon can I be treated?" I will not dilly dally about treatment. I think hepatitis C direct-acting antivirals are among the greatest discoveries in this century. I'd tell my doc to sign me up immediately!

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