Hepatitis C: Giving a Liver, Getting a Liver

April 24, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Blogging daily in April in recognition of National Donate Life Month. Please register as an organ donor and help to raise awareness about this lifesaving gift.

Years of living with chronic hepatitis C virus infection (HCV) destroyed my friend Rick's liver. Last year, a liver transplant saved his life. A motor vehicle accident killed a 19-year-old man, and now Rick is healthy. Not a day passes, that Rick doesn't say thank you for the life of the man whose liver restored Rick's health.

The same year Rick received his liver, I lost three friends who would have lived had hepatitis C been diagnosis earlier and they could have had a chance at liver transplantation. Rick was incredibly fortunate to have received a liver, because there is a major organ shortage in the U.S. Because of this shortage, more people die waiting for a liver than need be.

To address this shortage, we can do two things: increase the donor organ pool and reduce the organ demand. Some strategies that address the supply and demand:

- Increasing hepatitis C prevention practices through syringe exchange and increased education
- Screening, linkage to care, and treating all people hepatitis C
- Immunizing all children and unvaccinated people against hepatitis B
- Implementing awareness programs to reduce liver-injury risk, such as from alcohol, drug, and dietary supplement use
- Raise awareness of the impact of diet and exercise on the liver. Fatty liver disease is on the rise in the United States, which increases the need for organs and decreases in the number of viable livers.
- Increase the organ donor pool. For instance, countries that use an "opt-out" strategy have much higher donor rates. "Opt-out" means that everyone is a potential donor unless otherwise indicated. For instance, Germany uses an opt-in system and 12 percent of its population

consents to donate. Neighboring Austria uses an opt-out system, and has a consent rate of nearly 100 percent. The U.S. uses an “opt-in” strategy.

Register to donate even if you don’t think you are eligible. The eligibility requirements are constantly changing. We now use organs from people with hepatitis C. And while you are at it, ask family and friends to register too. The go out and celebrate life.

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