Hepatitis C and Heart Disease

February 19, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

In early 2018, the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) announced its new initiative, "Hepatitis C – It's About More than Liver Disease." Their goal is to increase awareness about hepatitis C-related health conditions that occur outside the liver.

Hepatitis C is more than a liver disease, and when it affects organs and tissue outside of the liver, we call these extrahepatic manifestations. NVHR points out that up to 74 percent of people with hepatitis C also have at least one hepatitis C-related extrahepatic manifestation. To raise awareness about these, NVHR published a general overview of hepatitis C-related extrahepatic manifestations, and will zero in on some of these in subsequent fact sheets.

Since February is American Heart Month, I thought I'd touch on the link between hepatitis C and cardiovascular disease. Many studies show that people with hepatitis C have higher rates of heart disease and strokes. However, an association between hepatitis C and cardiovascular disease doesn't prove that the virus causes the heart disease; it merely indicates a strong relationship.

Huh? If studies show that people with hepatitis C have a higher risk of heart disease and stroke, why doesn't that mean that the virus causes cardiovascular disease? There could be other factors at play here. It could be that people with hepatitis C don't exercise as much because they are too tired; or some other explanation. However, what we do know is that when people successfully respond to hepatitis C treatment, their risk for stroke and heart disease decreases. Is this because the virus is gone or is it because people feel better and are more active? We don't know.

Although the research on the link between hepatitis C and cardiovascular disease isn't entirely conclusive, taking care of your heart and health is always a good idea. Check out HepMag.com for tips for staying health.

The Bottom Line: If you have hepatitis C and want to improve your chances for survival, get treated. And take care of your health!

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