Hepatitis C: How many people getting sick does it take to make a change?

August 27, 2015 By Grace Campbell

Steve is a friend of mine. He is more than a friend, he is my mentor in living with (and hopefully without) hepatitis C. He is one of the people who helped me find the courage to live openly with my diagnosis. He has supported me down the line when I decided to be interviewed and start advocating for better access to the new treatments.

He is also very sick.

Today the Sydney Morning Herald, one of Australia's leading newspapers, did a story about Steve: his failed interferon regimes; his wait for treatment; the inexorable slide down the slope of cirrhosis. At last his success with Sofosbuvir and Olysio in clearing the virus, but that treatment coming too late for his liver. He is now on the transplant list. He is waiting for a new liver so he can have his old life back.

How many people will it take ending up as sick as Steve for our government to approve these life-saving drugs? How many people will the government decide can be kicked to the kerb before they start to save some instead?

How many?

Even one person is one person too many. For a government that prides itself on upholding the sanctity of life, they certainly seem willing to let a lot of people risk losing theirs.

This is a curable virus. Cure rates are generally 90% and greater. That's better than the odds with a lot of expensive cancer treatments, and yet we wait. We've waited for a cure to be developed. We've waited for it to be trialled. We've waited for it to be approved. And now we wait for access.

How long?

For some people, a day is too long. For others, a week. Everyone with hepatitis C knows the virus will progress. It won't kill everyone, but it will certainly seriously affect their quality of life. How much longer are our politicians prepared to play god with people's lives?

How much longer must we wait? How many more people must we sacrifice?

What will it take?

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