Hepatitis C in the Year Ahead

January 7, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

The big news that is buzzing around the hepatitis C community is the approval of Gilead Sciences' *Sovaldi* (sofosbuvir). Sovaldi plus ribavirin is the first all-oral hepatitis C treatment for genotypes 2 and 3. When used with peginterferon and ribavirin for patients with genotypes 1 and 4, Sovaldi showed high cure rates with only 12 weeks of treatment. The FDA sanctioned a broader application of Sovaldi, opening the door for all-oral hepatitis C treatment for patients with hepatocellular carcinoma (liver cancer) who are waiting for a liver transplant. The big surprise is that Sovaldi can be used with ribavirin for genotype 1 patients who cannot use interferon. More all-oral treatments are expected to be approved by the end of 2014.

Although this is wonderful news, my mind is occupied on the estimated 75% of people who have hepatitis C but do not know it. Without a proper diagnosis, Sovaldi and the drugs that follow it are powerless to help. One ray of hope is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendations to screen adults born between 1945 and 1965 for hepatitis C. This test is a preventive service with no cost to the individual.

What can you do about this? Urge every Baby Boomer you know to get tested for hepatitis C. If they ask why, tell them this: "Hepatitis C was rampant in the 60's, 70's and 80's. Hepatitis C is blood-borne disease that can live on surfaces for up to 6 weeks, and Baby Boomers were more likely to be exposed. It is not just how you lived, but when you lived that puts you at risk."

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