Hepatitis C on Our Small Planet

July 9, 2013 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Today is the first day of Ramadan, a holy time for Muslims. I wonder how this affects those with hepatitis C, particularly those living in Egypt which has dominated the news lately. Egypt has the highest prevalence of hepatitis C. The data vary, but using population data of 81 million people, coupled with the World Health Organization's 22% estimate, then approximately 18 million Egyptians have hepatitis C. A heartbreaking reality of Egyptian life is that nearly one in four people live with this disease, mostly due to unsanitary medical practices.

How did this happen? The roots began before 1986 because of another disease--*schistosomiasis.* Also known as, *bilharzia*, a common parasite found in contaminated water is the cause of this disease. The symptoms are awful, leading to multiple organ damage and chronic problems. Think of worms living and laying eggs in your body and you get the picture.

In a campaign to treat schistosomiasis, hepatitis C was spread via inadequately sterilized glass syringes and needle. Since hepatitis C infected so many people, it was easily passed via other medical and dental practices. The majority of hepatitis C cases in Egypt are genotype 4. Because chronic hepatitis C is so common, it is one of the leading of death, usually due to liver cancer or cirrhosis.

With so much unrest in Egypt, one can only imagine what more bloodshed means, not just in the short run, but in the long run. Freedom is worth fighting for, but for many Egyptians, there is no freedom from hepatitis C.

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