Hepatitis C: Screening, Screening, Screening

January 18, 2016 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Here's a story I've heard so many times that it raises my blood pressure even as I write it. "I am a baby boomer and I asked my doctor for a hep C test." He (she) asked me if I ever did drugs, had a blood transfusion, etc., and said I didn't need one."

My internal response: Pause here for a silent scream; it won't help if you appear to be a raving maniac. Also, don't cuss; it'll make things worse. Remember you are a professional. Don't clench your teeth when you reply.

What I actually say, "The CDC recommends one-time hepatitis C testing for adults born from 1945 through 1965 **without prior ascertainment of HCV risk factors**." (Note to self: it sounds like you were shouting that last part. You really have to work on your delivery.)

In 2012, the CDC recommended hep C testing for baby boomers. The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended it in 2013, thus opening the door for the cost of the test to be covered under medical insurance. However, we are falling short of the testing recommendations.

Nicole Cook and colleagues published research in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* (January 2016), titled "*Hepatitis C Virus Infection Screening Within Community Health Centers.*" They analyzed data from 60,722 patient office visits between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2013. Of these, 5033 (8.3%) were tested per the hep C screening guidelines. Women were less likely to be screened than men, regardless of ethnicity or race.

Even if you have been tested, urge your medical provider to follow the CDC USPSTF birth cohort hepatitis C screening for ALL his/her baby boomer patients. We can't treat patients for hepatitis C if they don't know they have it. We can't save lives if we don't know what's killing them.

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