Hepatitis C Treatment: The Decision to Try

April 13, 2015 By John Rickman

On April 7th 2015, blood was drawn to check for hepatitis C. This was one year from the date I was declared non-detectable for the virus in 2014. The results came back on April 13, 2015. I am still non-detectable for hep C. My doctor told me that unless I engaged in detrimental behavior, i.e. shared needles, sharing inhaling apparatuses for cocaine, etc. that I'm free of Hepatitis C. Upon discovering I had the disease, I still waited over a year before deciding to give the cure a try even though the doctor and I determined the disease was contracted 20+ years earlier. While each person's reason for beginning treatment when they do may be different, this was my thinking prior to starting the protocol of ribavirin, pegylated interferon, and sofosbuvir (Sovaldi).

When the disease was discovered I had no outward symptoms. It showed up in a blood scan when I was in rehab for prescription pain pill abuse. While I was definitely concerned, my first and foremost thinking at the time was completing my stint at the rehab facility and getting clean from the drugs I was taking. Upon coming home, I concentrated on getting healthy and finding out more about hepatitis C. Research led me to two conclusions. I should be taking this disease seriously because of the potential consequences to my health and the cure really sucks. At the time, neither Sovaldi nor Harvoni had been approved for use so the protocol was using pegylated interferon and ribavirin for 12 to18 months. I must admit that was not an appealing prospect.

I continued on for several more months but knowing I had hep C "nagged" at me every now and then. I still had no outward symptoms but I had the disease. I didn't want to wait until I was symptomatic so an appointment was made with my doctor. He referred me to a liver specialist in Dallas. They ordered sonograms and other tests to gauge the condition of my liver. This is where I learned that a new drug had just been approved (Sovaldi) that shortened the treatment time to 3 months. I had already made the decision to go the 12 to18 months with the present treatment protocol so this was really great news. We had some setbacks with my insurance but thanks to my doctors and some hepatitis C support groups, I was eventually approved for treatment and the costs were absorbed by the pharmaceutical companies that manufacture the necessary drugs.

My decision to start treatment was fueled by my desire to be free of this potential deadly virus. I'm sure anyone who has been told they had hep C felt/feels the same way. However length of treatment, potential side effects, and of course the cost, keeps many from beginning treatment immediately upon discovery of having the disease. With treatment time substantially reduced and side effects now more manageable because of Sovaldi and Harvoni, I think cost is the most prohibitive reason for avoiding treatment immediately. This saddens me as we now have an effective cure for a serious disease but it is out of reach for many due to the extreme cost of the drugs. As time goes by I am hopeful cost will diminish and as I said, there are support groups that are great at helping people get treatment at a greatly reduced cost. No matter the reason, it is important that if you have this virus, you make the decision to try to be cured. Your life could depend on it.

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