Justice

February 26, 2013 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

From time to time, news of hepatitis C outbreaks appear. I was in New Hampshire last year when a rather large hepatitis C outbreak was reported, traceable to a local hospital. For those of you who may not have read about it, hundreds of patients contracted hepatitis C from a medical employee who injected himself with medication intended for patients, and the needles/syringes with the remaining drug along with saline were given to patients. It turns out that the employee had worked in many medical centers in many states, and authorities are still collecting information about how many potential exposures there were.

This is awful. When patients are vulnerable, turning their lives over to healthcare providers, hoping to be fixed, they don't expect to inherit a new problem. This is a hideous injustice, plain and simple.

I have never found it helpful to expect justice. As a child, when adults told me life isn't fair, I didn't believe them. Now I do. It is easier to accept that life is unfair, and go on to the next questions, such as, "How can we stop this from happening again?" or, "How can we help these brothers and sisters who are joining our ranks?"

A useful question is, "Where is the good to be found in this? I see four potential good things here:

- New Hampshire is the only state in the country that doesn't have mandatory hepatitis C reporting. Perhaps this will change in light of this.
- Some people who had chronic hepatitis C were identified, and they may have remained undiagnosed had this not happened.
- Hepatitis C awareness may have increased in New Hampshire, and perhaps in the U.S.
- Perhaps, just perhaps, the hospital employee will get help, and perhaps lives were saved rather than lost.

I don't know that justice will be served in this case, but when I look beyond justice, I see hope.

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