Keep the Magic Going After World Hepatitis Day

July 30, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Although World Hepatitis Day 2018 has come and gone, the need for it has not. Viral hepatitis is still here, taking lives, and eating away at millions of livers. It takes more than one day to do this work. We need to apply constant effort, working towards a single goal—the elimination of viral hepatitis.

Important Notice: If you think that eliminating viral hepatitis has nothing to do with you, or if you are tempted to invoke the, "But I am just one person" excuse, just stop. We have a crisis on our hands, and in order to contain and eliminate hepatitis C, we need all hands on deck. This means you.

Nearly every day I read something inspiring about eliminating hepatitis C. Although all forms of viral hepatitis can be eliminated, hep C is particularly problematic since the number of new cases is expanding rather than shrinking. So, let me highlight one of the best reviews that I've read recently on the subject of hep C elimination.

Toward the elimination of hepatitis C in the United States by Sammy Saab, et al. (Hepatology June 2108) Bolstered by the emergence of effective treatments for hepatitis C, Saab and colleagues discuss the components necessary for hepatitis C elimination in the United States. Beginning with "a critical examination of technical feasibility, economic considerations, and social/political attention, the authors recommend:

- "Escalating existing surveillance networks to monitor for new epidemics.
- All preventive interventions such as clean syringe and needle exchange programs, safe injection sites, opioid substitution therapies, and mental health services need to be expanded.
- Universal hepatitis C screening for all adults rather than just for birth cohort and high-risk populations."

The researchers point out that elimination of hepatitis C will produce a savings of up to 6.5 billion USD annually. This savings does not include the other intangible benefits that will come about as a result of hep C elimination, such as increased work productivity and quality of life.

Of course, we know that elimination hasn't happened because of multiple obstacles. The authors of this article point out inadequate funding for hepatitis C-related services. Promotion and public awareness is low, while stigma remains high.

Saab and colleagues make a number of recommendations, including sustained public support. And that is where you and I come in. We are the public. We can support this. We can sustain our support. How? Here are a few suggestions:

- Confront stigma. Combat stigma with truth.
- Encourage people to be tested for hepatitis C. Birth year is the biggest single risk factor for hep C testing, which means that everyone who is born from 1945-1965 needs to be tested. If they say they assume their doctors' tested them already, encourage them to verify that.
- Contribute to your favorite hepatitis C non-profit. Every dollar counts.
- Keep talking and don't give up. If we turn our backs on those who have hepatitis C, we turn our backs on hope.

Want more ways to help? Click here and here and here and here.

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