National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Awareness Day

September 4, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

September 9th is designated National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Awareness (NAIRHHA) Day. The goal of NAIRHHA Day is to bring national and local attention to the needs of African immigrants living in the United States who are affected by HIV and viral hepatitis.

National awareness days support our collective goal of eliminating viral hepatitis and other epidemics in the United States and the world. Hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) are leading causes of chronic liver disease in the world. Both increase the risk of morbidity and mortality, leading to an increase in liver cancer.

Data on the prevalence of HBV and HCV among African immigrants and refugees is scant. Studies have shown that HBV is highly prevalent (>8%) in sub-Saharan Africa. Screening performed in African immigrant populations show a very high prevalence of HBV, ranging from 10-13%. Hepatitis C is a huge burden in many African countries. Studies show that immigrants and refugees have a high rate of hepatitis C.

Research indicates that hep C awareness is low in immigrant and refugee communities. Possible explanations for this are:

- Poor knowledge of the diseases, especially since viral hepatitis may be asymptomatic in early stages.
- Lack of access to healthcare, health information and treatment.
- Stigma associated with disease.
- Fear about documentation and/or immigrant status issues.

Find out more about NAIRHHA Day by visiting this link. Remember, when one of us has viral hepatitis or HIV, we all do. We are in this together.

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