Raising Hepatitis Awareness Rather Than Fear

May 14, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

I use Google Alerts to keep abreast of the latest news. Since May is Hepatitis Awareness Month, I assumed that this issue would dominate my news feed. Sadly, the story that seems to be more interesting to the news media is the one about the nurse from Puyallup, Washington who may have exposed patients to hepatitis C. The 31-year-old emergency room nurse allegedly infected at least two patients with hepatitis C by using some of their narcotics for herself and injecting them using the same needle.

Here is my problem with this story: it catches our attention because of its emotional content. We see victim and crime. We think, “This could happen to me or a loved one.” Or, “How could this happen!” It’s sensational.

The problem is, that it isn’t as bad as it looks. Yes, there may have been victims, but hep C is curable. At least this can be fixed. Something good may come out of it, because as a result of testing, some people will find out that they had hep C before this, and they can be cured.

I am not defending this nurse, although I do think she is sick and needs help too. I can’t completely criticize the media, because I’ve used sensational headlines to create attention. I confess, that my recent, “Arrested for Hepatitis? It Could Happen” headline was a bit over-the-top. The image of the handcuffs was sensational. It did get a lot of readers and tweeters and comments on social media.

But I wish I hadn’t gone that far. The real story is lost here, the less interesting but critical story of the millions of people affected by hepatitis C, and the lack of public response to change this. We can eliminate viral hepatitis. This is the important message; not the headlines of the emergency room nurse.

Let’s focus on awareness. Hepatitis Awareness Month is the most important story. Let’s keep this in the headlines.

Share ways we can #StopHep @hepatitismag.

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