Relationships and Hepatitis C-- Part 1

January 7, 2015 By Kimberly Morgan Bossley

Once a person is diagnosed with hepatitis C, the family dynamics and any relationship a person has will be affected in some way. Not only does the person suffering from hep C struggle because of this disease, but every family member, friend, co-worker, and boss will feel the change.

I will visit a few of these relationship scenarios and explain the issues it will cause and the stress that comes within that particular relationship. Here is Part 1 *

First scenario - a husband and father is the one suffering from hepatitis C. He is the main bread winner for the family, and now medical issues arising from hep C play into how he is feeling. He may begin to feel sicker and weaker, to the point he may no longer be able to hold a full time job. Stress from financial insecurity begin to take hold. If he is a father with young children, he will begin to fatigue more easily and not be able to partake in physical activity such as playing catch etc. These same factors - (tiredness and financial stress) affect him as a husband. He may be feeling like he is losing control of his strength as a man and head of his family unit. Depression sets in. He may worry about passing hepatitis C sexually to his wife. The lack of stamina he once had drives a wedge in the intimacy of the marriage. He is angry, frustrated, afraid of appearing weak. May begin to lash out at those around him, feeling that no one understands him. The once happy, strong, healthy man is now the one having to deal with being the one in need, the one that feels he is no longer the backbone of the family.

For the wife whose husband is fighting this nasty disease, she will begin to feel loneliness, fear about the stability of her family. She my begin to internalize her feelings for fear of adding more stress to her husband. Anger, fear, resentment of this disease (it stole her husband), depression and anxiety begin to take a toll on her. Often times you will hear women who are there supporting a husband through this disease say they have lost themselves. The roles in the family change, and the wife is handling all the activity and family functions on her own. Her new position may be an unwelcome surprise. She may be a mediator between her husband and anyone he comes into contact with, whether it is the doctor, pharmacy, friend, etc., and she finds herself having to explain to everyone her husband's new personality and condition. It becomes a never-ending ordeal of intervening and heading off trouble. She is always on guard.

This is where families suffering from hepatitis C begin to experience deep isolation. It is easier for both the husband and the wife to lock themselves away from the world, rather than constantly explaining and having to deal with the negative reactions to those they share their story with.

These times test marriages and committed relationships, either bringing them closer together or tearing them apart. All relationships are difficult at times, but having a serious health issue such as hep C adds an extreme amount of stress and hardship.

If the partners in the relationship are understanding, supportive and compassionate towards each other, they will be able to cling to each other to get through the battle ahead. However, if a relationship is filled with lack of support, compassion, understanding, or respect, it will be tested beyond measure, and more often than not it will fail.

Through my personal experience, I have been on both sides of this. It is awful to feel so sick; to not be able to completely share my feelings and open up truly throughout my fight for fear of being made fun of or not taken seriously. For me, this is the most difficult part of fighting this disease...getting others to understand what I feel like on a daily basis.

This disease is not one we carry on the outsides of our bodies. There is no way to “see” the pain felt with hepatitis C. It is up to each relationship to seek out information, counselling, or whatever it takes to gain an understanding of all aspects of this disease. Not only does the patient suffer, but anyone close to that person also suffers. We need to be more patient and kind towards each other in this fight. Give thanks to our caregivers as they have the burden to pick up the pieces we tend to leave behind.

The roles may feel like they have changed, and maybe for a short period of time they will, but keep focused on the goal...getting cured and getting your life back. Most of all, love and care for one another... if you are suffering from hep C, understand you are still needed to love, honor and respect your partner just as much as they need to honor those needs in you.

“Not without a FIGHT!~HCV~(c)” TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG !!

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