Stigma ’The Fear of it’

July 22, 2014 By Kimberly Morgan Bossley

Let’s face it, we all have experienced this at some point in our diagnosis…. STIGMA of HEPATITIS C.

Last week I discussed the effects of hepatitis C on our health. While writing the story, it dawned on me that a huge part of our stress comes from the stigma that hepatitis C places on our life once we are diagnosed. I know from my own experience from owning my business, it hurts when customers refuse to shake my hand or be within arm’s reach of me. The fear of sharing your diagnosis with others becomes overwhelming at times. What if I say I have this - Will I lose my job? Will I lose my friends? Will people think bad of me or think I am a nasty awful person? We begin to *hide* our health from others in fear of being rejected.

A few days ago I was being interviewed by Cosmopolitan Magazine. They were putting a story together about hep C and wanted to share my story. Of course I jumped at the opportunity to talk about hep C. They scheduled a time to link up with me and record my interview. I was on speakerphone and could hear a room full of reporters. My stomach always gets jittery every time I am about to share my story but this time, it was more so. This was a HUGE opportunity to be interviewed by a worldwide magazine.

The woman came on and advised me that our interview was being recorded. She asked me to state my name, my birth date and my diagnosis. I proceeded to share all the asked information. Then out of nowhere…. the dreadful question out of this ladies mouth was and I quote “ Ms. Bossley, how did you first feel when you found out you had a STD?” WHAT? My mind stopped and my heart began racing. “A WHAT?” I asked again hoping this woman was not appearing to be this ignorant. “How did you feel when the doctors told you that you had contracted a STD?”

Gaining my composure and every ounce of knowledge I had about hep c I replied “ Ms. Xxxxx, I need to do some formal educating here about hepatitis C”. “Hepatitis C is not a STD (sexually transmitted disease).” I proceeded to continue to share all the ins and outs about this disease; told her that this is why there is such a negative stigma tied to hep C. There is the lack of information and proper education as to what hepatitis C is and is not.

She being from a magazine that clearly only wants the ins and outs about the sexual part of the story was not hearing me. I spent a half an hour educating on how one can contract hep C. I told her this was a very important issue in our health care system and more education and awareness about hepatitis C needs to be told.

Many of us face situations daily that make us feel very uncomfortable about sharing our diagnosis. Some have experienced rejection, humiliation and shame.

I am here to say to you today that we can't stop the public from ridiculing those with hep C. But we can educate and properly share with them just what hepatitis C is and how it is transmitted. By doing this we are bringing more awareness and educating others about the spread and how its contracted.

I am not saying go out with a sign around your head and arrow pointing down to yourself "HEP C here". What I am saying is start small, start with a close friend you trust, share with them your situation and diagnosis. By doing this, one more person in this world is educated about this disease. Which means either one more being tested or one more protected by educating them on how it is contracted.

Just like me, I had to step out of my comfort zone and publicly speak of and about sex. It was hard enough having that talk with my kids but now I was speaking to a group of magazine editors about to write a false story about hep C. It was either me step up or millions get the wrong information reported to them.

Sometimes in order to grow we have to every once in awhile face our fear. Being willing to speak about your disease will give you courage to fight it head on. Hepatitis C is not something we need to feel ashamed of. What we need to do is say "OK, yes I contracted this disease, now I want to do something to help someone else so they don't have to go through such a hard difficult road. If we TALK about it it becomes a part of life. If WE make it a big deal, others will also. If we face that fear and discuss it, it allows someone totally not aware of what hep C is to be informed and educated about it.

All of us need to be willing to share our stories and help others.

As always, stay strong, stay positive and "NOT WITHOUT A FIGHTT!~HCV~(c) Together WE are STRONG!
Kim Bossley

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