The Healing Journey Begins; Beating Hepatitis C

April 23, 2015 By Matt Starr

Personally, today is a day of great potential. Today I begin a six-month course of the newest and most effective medicines developed to eradicate hepatitis C, the virus that changed my life so drastically. How has my life changed? I had to leave my teaching career behind a few years ago, as the energy needed to run a second or third grade classroom eroded. I loved my job. My life as an endurance athlete is a relic from another time - no more marathons, century bike rides, or endless full court basketball games for me. I miss that feeling of being lean and strong, but this is where growth and learning occurred. I had defined myself a certain way, but the truest me was heart-centered, spiritually-based, empathetic and reflective. I learned that looking good in a pair of jeans and being able to run for hours was largely ego-driven, and much less important than living with an open heart.

All of this is to say that it's been hard, but also revealing, going through the ups and downs of liver disease and the various complications that come with that package. The new hepatitis C treatment drugs have a success rate around 93 percent. These are great odds; much better that my previous three rounds of hep C treatments.

I started Harvoni and ribavirin this morning. The ribavirin is expected to cause anemia, but I hope to hit the woods for early morning summer walks and some gardening before tucking in to see what the rest of the day allows. I have a feeling that hammock naps, reading, writing, and Red Sox ball games will carry the day. Not such a bad fate!

Three months of ribavirin and anemia is not a short period of time, but not that long either, especially with the hope of a cure lights the end of the tunnel. Harvoni will continue for three more months, with no expected side effects.

This is a time of anxiety and excitement. What if the anemia is too much to bear? What if I am one of the 7% who are not cured? I've been living with this liver problem for quite a while, and honestly, I have not had the best of luck from the many attempts to "fix" things. But, I'm hopeful as well, as the odds are certainly in my favor.

I must not allow the feeling of pain and loss to drag me down, and instead lean into positive thinking, peace, and happiness. I like happiness, even when, and maybe especially when, things are rough.

As the Dalai Lama says,"...whether we are feeling happy or unhappy at any given moment often has very little to do with our absolute conditions but, rather, it is a function of how we perceive our situation, **how satisfied we are with what we have...**" (*The Art of Happiness* p. 22)

So, on Day One, I say hep C and short-term anemia be damned. Like many others, I have endured more. I will access the power of positive thinking to self-heal as much as I can, and open my body to receive Harvoni and ribavirin's power.

That's today. I'll be sending weekly posts to keep you all posted on progress and my response to treatment as I travel this new yet somewhat familiar journey.

Healing to You,

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