The Power of Hepatitis C Support Groups

February 11, 2013 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

It takes a community to maintain a human. - Earon Davis

If you ask me to list the most important advice for people with hepatitis C, I'd say, "Join a support group." Support groups work. They may sound touchy-feely, but a good group empowers people to make choices about their health, by providing solid information and insight on how to live with their disease. The potential value of support groups is not just theoretical--there is evidence for it.

In the 1970's and 80's, Harvard-trained psychiatrist David Spiegel conducted research about support groups (published in The Lancet in 1989) and concluded: "Support groups can improve quality of life - reduce anxiety and depression, increase coping skills, and help symptom management. The most effective techniques involve facing the illness directly. There is no evidence that these techniques will cure an illness, but there is evidence that these may prolong life with cancer, heart disease, and other chronic diseases." (Spiegel, David Living Beyond Limits Fawcett Columbine 1993)

There are different kinds of groups, such as those we actively attend versus web-based groups. Groups may be education-oriented, providing literature, speakers, and other forms of information, while some focus primarily on providing emotional support to its members.

Some support groups are better than others are, whether the format is online or community-based. Groups may be positive and upbeat, while others may be unnecessarily negative. The quality of a support group is influenced by its leadership as well as its regular members. Try a group a few times, and if it doesn't feel supportive, look for another one.

To learn more about hepatitis C support groups or to find one in your area, visit www.hcvadvocate.org. Look for Internet-based groups on Hep Forums, Facebook, Yahoo Groups, and Google.

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