Thought You Couldn’t Get Hepatitis? Think Again

January 16, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Much of my life’s work has been devoted to hepatitis C. I’ve been a clinical research nurse, advocate, teacher, writer, and activist. I was also a person who lived with hepatitis C, was a subject in a hep C clinical trial, and now I am cured. I’ve known more than a few people who have died from this disease, so I more than welcome the new treatments.

Experts all over the world are discussing plans to eradicate hepatitis C. We can cure it, and perhaps someday we can eradicate it. Sounds like I will be out of a job before long. Nothing would please me more.

Except for one problem. There is another hepatitis that is outpacing hep C in terms of seriousness: Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). This hepatitis isn’t caused by a virus; it’s caused by inactivity, being overweight and eating an unhealthy diet. In short, NAFLD is a lifestyle-related illness.

I blogged about NAFLD in November. Since then, the pile of evidence just keeps getting bigger. More data was just released in a recent piece in the journal, Gastroenterology, piled on more data. (Changes in the Prevalence of Hepatitis C Virus Infection, Non-alcoholic Steatohepatitis, and Alcoholic Liver Disease Among Patients with Cirrhosis or Liver Failure on the Waitlist for Liver Transplantation, David Goldberg, et al.)

Goldberg and team analyzed 3 databases (NHANES, HealthCore, and UNOS), found the proportion of patients on the liver transplant waitlist or undergoing liver transplantation for hep C-related reasons were decreasing, but there were increases in the numbers for those affected by fatty liver disease or alcoholic liver disease.

Personally, I didn’t get cured from hep C so I could get another liver disease. Fortunately, I don’t have to, and neither do you. If you are overweight, try losing whatever you can. A few pounds is better than no pounds. Strive for a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise daily. Choose lean, healthy foods, lots of plants, and find ways to enjoy smaller amounts. Women: If you have liver disease, don’t drink. If your liver is healthy don’t drink more than a drink a day; men can drink two. Sleep 7 to 9 hours every night and brush your teeth at least twice a day. Brushing your teeth won’t protect you from fatty liver disease, but you want to have a nice smile when you are old and still healthy.

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