28 July 2015: Time for Action

July 28, 2015 By David Pieper

I was working in Las Vegas in the summer of 2002 and I struggling through a ferocious fever that lasted several days. In hindsight, that was my hep C sero-conversion, and I was diagnosed shortly afterward. That's not a long time compared with many who have lived with hep C for 30 years or more, but I've already been on the treatment rollercoaster twice. So has my partner, because twice I have unwittingly transmitted the hep C virus to him. We don't inject drugs, but we do what every other couple does - we have sex.

I'm not making a judgement about people who do inject drugs, but in dealing with sexually transmitted hepatitis C, the most intimate part of our relationship is now the most challenging. After two rounds of treatment, he's clear of hep C, so we are now in a "sero-discordant relationship". Despite the precautions we take, I live in fear that loving him might transmit the virus to him for a third time. It's just the sort of thing that leads to the unresolvable arguments that other couples break up over.

Today is World Hepatitis Day (WHD), one of just eight international health days officially sanctioned by WHO, in recognition of the fact that 4000 people die every day from hepatitis related liver disease. Behind that alarming statistic are hundreds of individual stories like mine. In Australia, WHD was promoted using the slogan "Time for Action", and it is time for action on my hepatitis C.

Today, after 13 years of either one or both of us dealing with hepatitis treatment and the risk of transmitting it to each other, I found out I have been accepted onto a study of an all-oral, interferon- free treatment that can cure hepatitis C in just 12 weeks, with minimal side effects. It's a study specifically for people who also have HIV, as both of us do. Although these drugs are already in use around the world, the study is designed to give clinicians experience in using this treatment, and confidence in applying them to specific patient groups, in this case people who also have HIV.

I'm excited and emotional at the prospect of starting this treatment. But after two unsuccessful treatments, and seven years of waiting, there's a lot riding on this. I have to clear it this time.

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