World Hepatitis Day

July 22, 2014 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

On July 28, we observe World Hepatitis Day, a global effort to raise awareness about the potential devastating nature of viral hepatitis. Viral hepatitis is a worldwide problem, and although hepatitis A, B, C, and E are all harming the inhabitants of this planet, I am particularly committed to stopping hepatitis C virus. There are vaccines for hepatitis A and B: none for hepatitis C.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 130-170 million people have chronic hepatitis C, claiming more than 350,000 annual deaths. The countries with the highest prevalence of hepatitis C are Egypt (22%), Pakistan (4.8%) and China (3.2%). Unsafe injections using contaminated equipment are the most common transmission routes.
Reports about the prevalence of hepatitis C in Egypt vary, but using population data of 81 million people, coupled with WHO's 22% estimate, then approximately 18 million Egyptians have hepatitis C. A heartbreaking reality of Egyptian life is that nearly 1 in 4 people live with this disease, mostly due to unsanitary medical practices.

Pakistan is the 6th most populated country in the world. Using WHO's estimate of nearly 5% prevalence rate, there are more than 9 million people in Pakistan with hepatitis C.
China is third on WHO's prevalence list. Because it has the highest population, more people in China have hepatitis C, with estimates of more than 41 million people. Add to that the fact that around 170 million people in China have hepatitis B and you have a country with a high incidence of liver disease.

Hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne virus in the U.S.; a virus that infects approximately 2.7 million people (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). More people die in the U.S. from hepatitis C than from HIV. The majority of people who have hepatitis C are Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1965. Hepatitis C can go undetected for decades. As Boomers age, damage from hepatitis C may progress more rapidly. Hepatitis C-related liver disease, liver cancer, and deaths are on the rise.

Hepatitis C can be treated, but you have to know you have it first. More than half of those with hepatitis C do not know they have it, a fact we can change. If you are a Baby Boomer, get tested. If you know a Baby Boomer, suggest that they get tested. Can you think of a better way to observe World Hepatitis Day?

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