World Hepatitis Day Call to Action

July 28, 2016 By NVHR

Today the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable commemorates World Hepatitis Day. We pause to reflect on the profound and devastating global impact of viral hepatitis. We remember those who have lost their lives and honor those living with viral hepatitis by renewing our commitment to the fight against hepatitis B and C. And we thank NVHR members and colleagues for their tireless dedication to end the viral hepatitis epidemic.

This year's World Hepatitis Day is particularly somber, given a recent report showing that viral hepatitis is the 7th leading cause of death around the globe, killing at least as many people annually as tuberculosis, malaria, or HIV/AIDS. This report follows grim news released earlier this year that hepatitis B and C are the leading causes of liver cancer in the United States and hepatitis C kills more people than 60 other infectious diseases (including HIV/AIDS) combined.

NVHR strongly endorses the simple, powerful theme of this year's World Hepatitis Day: ELIMINATION. Elimination of hepatitis B and C is not only feasible but it is the only way to end the suffering, grief, and loss associated with both diseases. We join our colleagues around the world in calling for the elimination of viral hepatitis by the year 2030. We urge everyone – organizations and individuals – to be an active participant in NOhep, a global movement to eliminate viral hepatitis. This campaign launches today and will serve as the organizing platform to ensure that our governments are fulfilling commitments to reach elimination goals by 2030.

We are also supporting efforts to ensure that the United States is a leader in the elimination movement by co-sponsoring the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's process to develop a National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis B and C. The Committee designing this strategy will meet soon to discuss elimination goals and barriers and identify stakeholders responsible for achieving goals. The final report is expected to be released in early 2017.

Elimination goals will not be realistic, however, without addressing the harmful obstacles faced by the viral hepatitis community. Viral hepatitis is shamefully underfunded by the federal government and no increase is proposed in the House or Senate versions of the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bill. Many people with hepatitis C, particularly those who use drugs, continue to be denied access to curative treatment due to discriminatory restrictions placed by public and private payers. Hepatitis B and C medications are often placed on high tiers by private insurance, resulting in unaffordable cost-sharing.

There has not been wide-spread implementation of U.S. Preventive Services Task Force hepatitis B and C screening recommendations. Stigma continues to be a significant obstacle to address hepatitis B and C as public health problems, resulting in continued health disparities in both epidemics. And the federal response to the nation's opioid/overdose epidemic has unfortunately missed opportunities to significantly address and prevent the increase in hepatitis B and C infections among people who inject drugs. The federal government, including our next President, must pledge to overcome these and other barriers if the United States is to fulfill our commitment to eliminating viral hepatitis.

We look forward to working together to demand leadership, policies, and funding to eliminate hepatitis B and C in the United States and around the globe. Thank you again for all you do on behalf of people living with and at risk for hepatitis B and C.

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