A World Without Hepatitis Advocates

August 6, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Can you imagine a world without advocates fighting to make a difference for those affected by viral hepatitis? How many more people would be dead or suffering from the devastation of hepatitis B and C? Without advocates, you and I might not be here. Or we may be living with the horrible signs and symptoms of cirrhosis. Perhaps we would be grieving over the death of a loved one.

Last week, we said good bye to one of the best advocates there is, Chris Taylor of NASTAD (National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors). He leaves a legacy that anyone would be proud of, and you can read more about him here and here.

Earlier this year, we lost another key advocate, Ryan Clary, executive director or the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR). The hole he left was huge.

However, the deepest recent loss for the viral hepatitis community was the death of Orlando Chavez. Orlando's death reminded me that our work here is temporary. It takes constant, consistently applied pressure to eliminate hepatitis.

We need to add more advocates to the fold—lots more. And you know I am talking to you. Perhaps you are doing something already, and if so, you get a free pass. Maybe you are burned out. If so, take a brief vacation from advocacy. Practice high-quality self-care. But then return to this work. Please.

Drum up enthusiasm. Ask others to join the cause. Pay attention to opportunities. Find out more about NVHR's Hepatitis C Patient Summit.

Ignore excuses. You may think you aren't qualified to do anything. I've got news for you. The only qualification that Alan Franciscus had when he started the HCV Advocate was passion. Ditto for Connie Welch, Rick Nash, Carleen McGuffey, Orlando Chavez, and dozens of other advocates. Passion is a good quality for getting started. So is fear if it spurs you on rather than paralyzes you.

Don't have much time? If you have a minute, you have enough time. You can call elected officials and let them know that you want them to make elimination of viral hepatitis a priority. For more ideas, read Chris Taylor's Eliminating Viral Hepatitis: Recommendations for Action.

Then get busy. We need your help.

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