Wrapping Up Hepatitis Awareness Month

May 28, 2019 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Hepatitis Awareness Month is nearly over, so I thought it a perfect time to talk about the liver. This remarkable organ has been venerated in art, poetry and myth. Plato thought that the desiring soul resided in the liver. Galen, considered to be the father of modern medicine felt similarly. Shakespeare thought that anger lived in the liver.

Fortunately, these speculations about the liver are now disproven. If Galen had been right, liver transplantation would have serious consequences. Would a transplant patient get a new soul along with a new liver?

The poet who did justice to the liver is Pablo Neruda. Born in Chile in 1904, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971, two years before his death. Neruda's 'Ode to the Liver' is a beautiful poem, and quite frankly, showed a profound understanding of the liver.

Because 'Ode to the Liver' is protected by copyright, I can't reprint it. If you can find a copy, I highly recommend reading it. Neruda describes the liver as a "profound worker" and "huge life flyer." He expresses the untiring nature of the liver, stating that this mighty organ is the last to leave the party.

And so it is with the liver. One and a half quarts of blood flow through the liver every minute. It produces a quart of lymph fluid every day. The liver produces cholesterol and clotting factors. It processes all our nutrients, maintains hormonal balance, and regulates blood levels of amino acids. The liver converts poisonous ammonia to urea, clears toxins from our gut, filters drugs from our body, removes bacteria from the blood, and maintains our immune function. Vitamins and minerals are stored in the liver.

In short, the party happens in the liver, and thank goodness, the liver can handle it. That is, up to a point. Be kind to your liver. It's the only one you have, and you want it to be the last to leave the party. When it is gone, the party is over.

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