

STARTLING STATS: NOVA SCOTIA/PEI

From 2009 to 2010 Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were the only provinces to report an increase in the number of new cases of Hepatitis C—in all of Canada!

Baby Boomers & Hepatitis C

According to Dr John Ward of the Centers for Disease Control in the U.S., “one of every thirty-three baby boomers is living with hepatitis C infection”.

The recent increase in deaths among baby boomers in the United States has created an emphasis in Canada on diagnosing and treating the disease. In fact, doctors are recommending that boomers get tested for HCV at least once.

“They’re now trying to say if you’re born between 1945 and 1965 – that is a baby boomer – you actually have a reasonable chance of having hepatitis C in North America. All of those people should routinely get hep C testing at least once” says Toronto Western Hospital’s Dr. David Wong.

A common scenario is someone who experimented with drugs as a teenager in 1968 just once or twice, and got infected without knowing it. Symptoms don’t occur until there’s liver failure about 20 to 30 years later, Wong said.

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SPREADING THE WORD: PARTNERSHIP PROJECT SUCCESS

In partnership with the Atlantic Interdisciplinary Research Network (AIRN) and Direction 180, HepNS was proud to be a part of the “Spread the Word, Not the Virus” Project. This venture, funded by the Halifax Community Health Board, created a workshop designed to educate people, who have experience with intravenous drug use, on how to reduce their risk of infection with HIV and Hepatitis C and to share safer practice information with those living with HIV and/or hepatitis C.

In March of 2012, a group of nine men and women from Direction 180 participated in the three hour workshop and gave rave reviews. Covering topics such as the liver, hepatitis C, HIV and AIDS, co-infection, transmission and treatment, the workshop facilitators combined question/answer, informal discussion and activities to share the information.



Workshop facilitators Mia and Caitlin

According to Caitlin, one of the workshop presenters: “The facilitation of the workshop went better than we had even dreamed. Participants seemed to really enjoy it; they asked questions, participated in the activities, and most of them stuck around at lunch to chat with each other and us. We had positive feedback both in the evaluation survey and through conversations with clients and staff. It was a huge success!”

CONTINUING THE SUCCESS: HEPNS LAUNCHES NEW PROGRAM

In April, HepNS launches a new Spread the Word, Not the Virus program, modelled after the project originally funded by the Halifax Community Health Board. This new program, made possible through a grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada, will provide workshops about HIV/HCV co-infection in various community agencies across Nova Scotia.

Aimed at providing information to people who have experience with IV drug use, men who have sex with men, and people who are living with HIV, HepNS plans to deliver approximately 20 workshops in community agencies over the next two years.

“We are thrilled to be able to add these amazing workshops to the HepNS line up to top quality presentations. We can now reach communities we just didn’t have the resources to reach before” says Executive Director Colin Green.

FIRST PERSON: “MY SECRET WAS NOT A KEEPER”

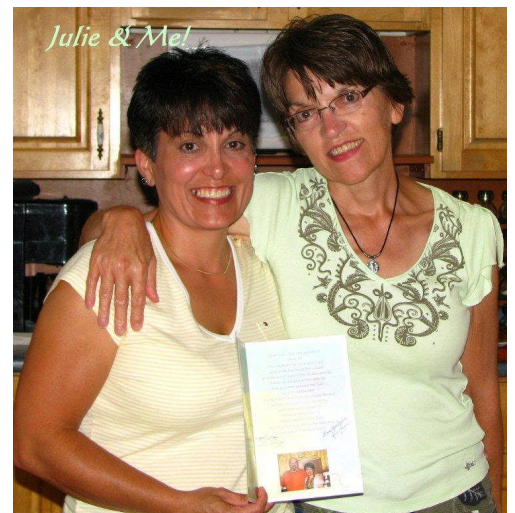
In the beginning I didn't have any difficulty in mentioning the fact that I had Hepatitis. I was diagnosed back in October of 1974 after a complicated childbirth in July. I had blood transfusions due to severe hemorrhaging after the birth. I truly feel that the Hepatitis was brought on by infected blood. That time frame was so long ago even the medical people did not know what Hepatitis was all about. It was known then as infectious hepatitis (contracted from unsanitary conditions) or serum hepatitis (contracted from blood.)

At that time no one could determine if I had serum hepatitis even though the medical team knew that I took in several units of blood intravenously and the fact that I had been taking it for several days that I became allergic to it. When this happened the blood was exchanged for plasma which can also be infected; or so I have learned from up to date information. I was asked many questions which mostly implied that I had consumed the germ at some point from being around someone who had already been infected. The doctor's logic had never implied anything about infected blood. Years ago, people did not use their hard earned money on eating out often. For us there was hardly enough to make do for bills from one paycheck to the next. Although I didn't eat out or had been around anyone with infectious hepatitis the medical people continued to assume that I was contagious. While I was in the hospital in isolation and my family was not permitted to visit me without wearing a gown; the cleaning staff did not come around for more than a week while my room got very dusty and unsanitary. Each day I could hear them in the hall and I could see them coming and going in other patient's rooms. I felt the stigma then.

After being hospitalized for about five weeks, I came home to rest with our girls Julie age 4 years and Anne 4 months. I was not doing so well at looking after baby Anne even though I had Julie's help. I remember leaning over the sink holding myself up to wash and sterilize baby bottles. My energy was low and I constantly felt tired. My mom who lived next door cared for Anne and made meals for my family. Julie and I spent time with Anne every day making sure she would not forget us. By springtime I was feeling better and able to have Anne back home. I'm also thankful that I was gradually able to get back to doing household chores and we were a family again.

It was twenty-four years later when I found out through a blood test that I am positive for Hepatitis C. With all the knowledge that I was made aware of from the public health nurse; I decided I would not be sharing this information with anyone including our girls; no one except my husband Alton. This knowledge was so upsetting to me I felt that I would rather not know at all. Whenever the word Hepatitis was talked about, I closed a blind eye and turned a deaf ear.

Finally in 2005 the health nurse recommended again that I should at least go and see what treatment was about. Throughout the spring and summer months I began my journey for treatment which was no easy task. I wondered how I would get through all of this without revealing my secret. I decided that I would tell people I was being treated for cirrhosis. This is one of the most terrifying conditions that Hepatitis C can cause without any symptoms; especially if it has been left unrecognized for many years.



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*Join us for the
Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia's Annual General Meeting
Saturday June 2nd, 10:30 am*

9th Floor Room 929, Centennial Building

Victoria General Hospital 1276 South Park Street, Halifax

If you are interested in joining this dynamic board, call Colin at 902-420-1767
or email Director@HepatitisOutreach.com

RESEARCH REVIEW: HCV, TATTOOS & PIERCINGS

A recent review published in Oxford Journal's Clinical Infectious Diseases showed no definitive evidence for an increased risk of HCV infection when tattoos and piercings were received in professional parlors. However, the risk of HCV infection is significant, especially among high-risk groups when tattoos are applied in prison settings or by friends. Prevention interventions are needed to avoid the transmission of hepatitis C from tattooing and piercing in prisons, homes, and other potentially nonsterile settings.

Given the rise in tattooing and piercing amongst youth, the study recommended that youth be educated on the need to have tattoos and piercings performed under sterile conditions to avoid HCV infection.

<http://cid.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/01/19/cid.cir991.abstract>

For more information on safer tattoo and piercing workshops for youth, see "Hip Not Hep" on www.HepatitisOutreach.com

MY SECRET CONT'D

After knowing the diagnosis of my liver being advanced to first grade cirrhosis, I felt that I was not telling a complete lie about treatment. By November I confided with my girls. Both were worried for me and were upset that I had not mentioned a word to them. They reminded me about the Hepatitis in 1974 how they knew about it then and how it remained a secret all those years. Why would this be any different?

When I confided with my friends it wasn't long until I heard it back from another friend with whom I did not confide in. From there my secret began to snowball. After this lesson was learned the hard way I think it is much easier to talk about problems upfront. If anyone including family or friends cannot learn and know that there is no need for this great stigma that goes with Hepatitis C, I believe that the relationship is their loss. There are many other diseases ongoing and seem to be recognized by others. Why should it be so difficult to recognize Hepatitis C?

Bette

I was always fond of this quote I read on a church yard bulletin:
"Never look down on someone, unless it is to bend over to help them up."

JOIN US: SKILLS NEEDED

Ever thought of joining a not-for-profit board?

Looking to add serving on a board to your resume?

Have skills you want to share?

The HepNS Board of Directors is looking for new members. In addition to recruiting people who are passionate about a great cause and have a knowledge of HCV, the board also needs expertise from the legal, naturopathy and financial communities.

For more information call Colin at: 902-420-1767 or Director@HepatitisOutreach.com

A THOUGHT

The HCV infection rate in our federal prisons is 39 times greater than in the general population.

The HIV infection rate is 15 times greater.

Mandatory sentencing crime bills are already linked to higher incarceration rates—can we expect even higher rates of HIV and hepatitis C?

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HepNS is a charitable organization that reduces the impact of hepatitis through support, information and education.

Community Connections is a quarterly informative publication of the Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia. We welcome your comments and contributions.

If you would like to contribute to the work of HepNS, see the "Sponsors" page on our website.

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www.HepatitisOutreach.com



Don't ignore it. Hepatitis is a potentially fatal disease that affects 1 in 12 people worldwide, but there are rarely obvious symptoms.

This is **hepatitis...**

Know it. Confront it. Get tested.

World Hepatitis Day: 28 July

www.HepatitisOutreach.com

 **HepNS**
Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia