

Wiping Out Hep C in New Mexico

www.nmhepc.org · 505.314.6665

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President's Message

MAY IS HEPATITIS C AWARENESS MONTH

In recognition of Hepatitis Awareness Month in May, I am urging all New Mexicans to learn more about the hepatitis C virus, which affects thousands of our citizens. Hepatitis C is the most common chronic, bloodborne infection in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 4.1 million Americans have been infected with hepatitis C. Some 8-10,000 hepatitis-C related deaths occur nationally each year, and hepatitis C infection is the leading indication for liver transplants in the US.

Because a person may have significant liver damage before symptoms of disease develop, and the consequences of chronic hepatitis C infection may only become apparent 20 to 30 years after infection, it is often called the "silent epidemic." Approximately 20 percent of individuals with chronic hepatitis C infections develop cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver, and one to five percent develop liver cancer. Chronic liver disease is now among the top ten causes of death among American adults, and chronic hepatitis C accounts for 40 to 60 percent of all chronic liver disease.

There is currently no effective vaccine against hepatitis C, nor is there an effective post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent infection following an exposure. Therefore, the Alliance supports the prevention efforts of NMDOH, Project ECHO and local health departments. The goal is to reduce the number of new hepatitis C infections by providing free screenings for high-risk individuals. During the screening process trained counselors advise high-risk individuals on methods for preventing hepatitis C infection and transmission.

Individuals who test positive for hepatitis C also are counseled on steps they can take to minimize liver damage, such as avoiding alcohol, getting vaccinated for hepatitis B and hepatitis A and obtaining medical follow up treatment. Our goal is to support and empower people infected by this disease and stop the occurrence of new infections.

During the month of May, you have the opportunity to learn more at our Awareness Day Activities: We'll be in Roswell May 5; Albuquerque and Edgewood May 12; Espanola May 19; and Santa Fe May 26. Check locations and schedules in your local newspapers. Hope to see you many of you there!

As always, I wish you and your loved ones good health.

Think About It

"... Everything can be taken from a person but one thing; the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Victor E. Frankl

Our Person of the Month

Each person infected with hepatitis C finds a way to survive and even thrive despite the disease. Each journey is unique. For some, religious beliefs are a source of comfort; for others it may be a treasured friendship, a hobby, and/or sharing fears with a support group. There is no one perfect formula that works for everyone. We do not use last names in these articles, to protect the privacy of our contributors. This month, William, a New Mexican with hepatitis C shares his story.

In 1971 at 12 years old, I started smoking cigarettes and pot. Three years later found me experimenting with white crosses, a pill form of speed. By 1979 after hanging out with a bad crowd, I started snorting crack, which is now known as Crystal Meth. By 1980, I was shooting up. I should have died several times due to these activities, but that was not to be. In 1983 I met my wife, who found my needles and gave me an ultimatum: "Stop using, or I will leave you." While I did stop intravenous injections, I continued to drink socially and do drugs. Most of old group that had influenced me to start were gone; in prison or dead.

1989 was a good year. I worked hard, spent more quality time with my loving wife and children and started my own business. By 2000, my combined income from the business, the factory and investments came to \$950,000. But at that time, my health began to deteriorate. I experienced flu-like symptoms, low grade fevers, lung infections, mild disorientation and, worst of all, debilitating fatigue. As my symptoms worsened, my doctors sent me to a psychiatrist when they couldn't determine what was wrong with me. It was the psychiatrist who ordered the bloodwork which showed I had hepatitis C. My viral load was 1,500,000 and I had cirrhosis of the liver. I began treatment in September and my viral count went down to 1,250. I thought I would be back on my feet in a few months, but by May I was

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William's Story (continued from page 1)

feeling worse than ever and I had to stop treatment in July. My viral load climbed back up to 1,300,000 and by now my business was failing too. I filed for Chapter 13 and in September, 2005 began treatment again with a new doctor. It helped me mentally and I hoped I would be cured. But in January, 2006, I developed a lung infection and a urinary tract infection which caused me to be on and off treatment through May. At that point the treatment came to a complete halt because I needed surgery on my kidneys. By this time, I had lost my business, equipment and land. I can't begin to explain what it did to me, but I did find out some important things. During this time, I began to read the Bible and I found Jesus Christ. That changed everything. Without the help of my God, my wife and family and friends, I don't believe I could have survived. In February, 2007 I began a maintenance treatment. I am indebted to my doctor and his staff for their support and encouragement throughout my ordeal.

Some people, especially when they are young, can be careless in their desire to party, experiment and have fun. I caution them to learn from my experience. In the prime of my life, unaware of the consequences of my youthful misadventures, I was struck down. I reaped what I sowed.

It has taken me years to forgive myself for what I alone had done to my body, but through Christ, I found peace. I still have rough days, but the Lord is my comfort.

Submitted by William

If you would like to share your story with us, please send it to *Gabriela de Boer*, NMHCA, P.O. Box 6601, Albuquerque, NM 87197. Please include a telephone number or email address with your story. Due to space limitations, the editor reserves the right to edit submissions. It is our policy not to publish your last name.

**Learn How to be
An Effective Advocate**

**Mark your calendar
"MEET YOUR LEGISLATOR"
TRAINING"**

**Saturday, June 16, 2007
1 - 5 pm**

Location TBA

**Watch for details
in May & June newsletters**

**Here's your chance to make a difference!
Join the Alliance and help change the
Course of Hepatitis C Infection in NM**

At NMHCA, you'll meet new people and old friends all working to achieve the same goals. You'll learn how to reduce your risk of becoming infected with hepatitis C and you'll learn how you can have a positive impact on the lives of those already infected. You can develop your skills in public speaking, team building, advocacy, and networking. If you are a primary caregiver to someone infected with hepatitis C, you'll find plenty of support and valuable information. Best of all, you'll be part of a dedicated group of volunteers committed to stop the spread of this silent epidemic. It's a bargain at \$10 a year, and every penny we raise goes towards educating, reaching out and advocating for New Mexicans infected or affected by hepatitis C. Please consider joining us today. All you need to do is complete the form below and send it with a \$10 check to:

NMHCA, P.O. Box 6601, Albuquerque, NM 87197

Yes, I want to join the NM hepatitis C Alliance.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ **Fax** _____

e-mail _____

If you have a special skill or interest, please let us know:

\$10 annual membership fee enclosed

Please make check payable to NMHCA, Inc. NMHCA does not accept credit card payment.



**NEW MEXICO
HEPATITIS C
ALLIANCE**

OUR MISSION: To create, coordinate and inspire participation in the "parade" that will bring individual, community, state, and national awareness and resources to hepatitis C prevention and treatment

OUR VISION: A compassionate, non-judgmental society that ensures education and universal, equitable access to resources to prevent, manage, and cure HCV infection, and support all of those infected and affected by this disease