



Community Connections

Keeping Nova Scotians Informed about Hepatitis

January 2009

- Do you have questions or seek information about hepatitis?
- Are you newly diagnosed and need support?
- Feeling alone and want to talk to someone who understands?

CALL US

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!

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Infected, Affected and Treatment for Hepatitis C

By Bette MacAloney

INFECTED: After the birth of our second daughter in July of 1974, I required an emergency blood transfusion due to severe haemorrhaging. By October I was barely able to care for my children. I complained to the doctor of itchy skin, fatigue and dark coloured urine. The doctor noticed my skin and the whites of my eyes were yellow. He immediately made a phone call to admit me to the hospital for a few days in isolation.

The doctor talked about hepatitis but I had never heard of hepatitis. Back then it was either known as infectious hepatitis (the kind you get from eating contaminated food or water) or serum hepatitis (the kind you get from blood). I was treated as if I had infectious hepatitis: I was isolated, asked to wash hands thoroughly using a nail brush, and told not to eat off of the same dishes as other family members. I was not sick, and other than being tired and itchy, I felt well and wanted to go home. I had a four-year-old daughter and a new baby girl to look after. I was there for almost three weeks before I was released and instructed to continue the personal hygiene routine. I needed lots of rest and I had to leave the baby with my mom.

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Program Coordinator's Message

I hope everyone had a good holiday season. Mine was fairly low-key but I did get to spend some time with great friends (who love to cook) and my sister sent her annual package of home-made goodies, so I'm counting my blessings and temporarily ignoring the bathroom scale.

We've got lots to do this year. The 2009 Lucky Duck Lottery runs from February 8 to April 24. Tickets are \$1 each and 70 cents goes to our charity, and we really need it. Please give me a call if you would like to buy or sell tickets.

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month with May 19 being World Hepatitis Day. I'm in contact with the World Hepatitis Alliance and trying to organize Nova Scotia's very first awareness event on that day. I'd appreciate any suggestions you may have. It would ideal to make this truly province-wide by involving organizations from all regions.

The board and I have started organizing our online auction for May. Many lessons were learned from last year's fundraiser. I have spoken with a company who is willing to supply the software at no charge. This is a big opportunity for us to raise some necessary funds. Again I'd appreciate any assistance you can offer. Perhaps you know someone or a company that would like to donate something for auction? No item is too small.

Our "Know the Risks – Know the Facts" safer tattooing and piercing program for youth is getting ready to launch. Leigh Aube, a student from Dalhousie University's Health Promotion program, piloted it in November to a very receptive audience. I'm now working with various school nurses to implement it into the Youth Health Centres.

So as you can see 2009 is going to be a very busy year for the Hepatitis Outreach Society. Come be part of it. I wish you a happy and healthy new year!
Angus

Infected, Affected and Treatment for Hepatitis C

Cont'd from page 1



A very healthy
Bette MacAloney

"By putting my feelings on paper it has helped me become more open about living with hep C"

It was good that mom lived next door and we could visit every day. She made our meals, including my special low fat diet. After Christmas, I felt well enough to bring the baby home and by summer of 1975 I was finally getting back to normal.

All of my family knew what I had been through and we were all relieved to know that I was getting better. There was very little information about hepatitis available and we just accepted it like an illness that you dealt with, recovered from, and that's the end of it. That's not even close as to what it was really like.

AFFECTED: Who would believe that a virus could stay inside a body for years and not have any symptoms? I was shocked to find out that I had hepatitis C after recovering from infectious hepatitis 24 years earlier. I really didn't know how to react to the news in 1998. I had this for a long time and felt healthy and well.

A public health nurse came to my home and we talked for almost three hours. She asked a tremendous amount of questions and informed me about the virus and what I needed to be aware of. That day the nurse started the vaccination process to protect me against hepatitis A and B.

When the nurse left I made a decision that I would not tell anyone other than my husband, not even my family, that I had hep C. I felt that I had lived 24 years without knowing, so why would anyone else need to know. I was afraid of what others might think.

In September 2001 our eldest daughter was having health issues. Before being diagnosed with a gallbladder problem I had noticed that her skin and whites of her eyes were yellow. Her doctor asked her questions about hep C and if she had been around anyone with it. She was frightened and I had to tell both our daughters my secret. Both girls armed themselves with as much information as possible, and I asked them to keep my secret just that. Fortunately our eldest did not have hepatitis; I learned that jaundice does not automatically indicate hepatitis.

TREATMENT: I eventually began treatment in January 2006. I was sceptical of talking about hep C, and after knowing the damage to my liver was in the first stages of cirrhosis I told my friends that I was being treated for cirrhosis. My mom guessed my diagnosis, but I continued to say I was being treated for cirrhosis as that was all I was comfortable with telling people. That was all that mattered.

During treatment I wrote in my journal every day of how I was feeling and the things I was able to do. I had a lot of time alone and I did a lot of thinking about when I first had those blood transfusions in 1974. Each time I saw my nurse practitioner I took a list of questions. She said I was extremely organized and I should write a book.

In January 2007 I submitted my first article for publication in the Spring *Community Connections*. This is now the sixth time I have shared my experiences. By putting my feelings on paper it has helped me become more open about living with hep C, and I feel that I am helping others.

I finished treatment May 2007 and have tested negative for hepatitis C. Knowledge is power, stay informed, and be well. We're not alone.

Lucky
Duck
Lottery



Win \$3,000 or \$500 or \$100
or a Weekend Get-Away for Two at Oak Island Resort & Spa

Tickets are only \$1 each

To purchase tickets call 420-1767 or 1-800-521-0572 or email Program@HepatitisOutreach.com
Thank you for supporting the Hepatitis Outreach Society and Recreation Nova Scotia

Milk Thistle and Hepatitis

By Tracy Landry, Student, College of Pharmacy, Dalhousie University

Silymarin, most commonly known as Milk Thistle, is a natural health product traditionally used for various conditions including the treatment of liver and gallbladder disorders.

Several studies have reported an improvement in liver tests in patients with chronic viral or alcohol-related hepatitis using milk thistle. It has also been shown to improve liver function tests and decrease the number of deaths of patients with cirrhosis.

Another study using a specific silymarin product showed that patients with hepatitis C reported feeling better, but objective measures of quality-of-life and liver function tests were not improved after a year of treatment.

It is important to note that most of the studies carried out have been small and poorly designed. As a result of this and to inconclusive findings, more research is necessary before a strong recommendation can be made.

Milk thistle appears to be well tolerated and safe for oral use for up to 41 months. Nonetheless, there is always the possibility of unwanted side effects such as stomach upset, headache, itching and in rare instances appetite loss, gas, heartburn, diarrhoea, joint pain, and impotence. Milk thistle has the potential to interact with certain types of medication and disease states such as diabetes, and for that reason it is important to speak to a healthcare provider before commencing therapy with this product.

Furthermore it is important to note that herbs and supplements are not strictly regulated. Consequently there is no guarantee of the strength, purity or safety of these products, thus effects may vary.

It is a well known fact that today's society relies heavily on the internet to provide valuable information, including health and self medication. The main obstacle is to determine what is appropriate from the information given. Hence it is important to always speak with a healthcare provider before starting any new therapy, including natural health products.



Milk Thistle
Photo courtesy of
Jane Huber
www.bahiker.com

From the Inside: Strength to Spare

By Beverly Henry, reprinted from www.poz.com

During her 15-year battle to stay healthy with HIV and hepatitis C in prison, Beverly "Chopper" Henry, 59, has maintained an inspiring, positive attitude. She credits her well-being and determination to a refusal to hide her status. Here are her 10 tips for other positive prisoners:

1. Focus on you; learn all you can about your own health.
2. If you're on meds, take them as instructed – don't miss doses, and don't hide or share meds.
3. Join (or create) a support group with other positive peers.
4. Talk openly about HIV and hep C – that will help you and everyone else, even those in denial.
5. Avoid "high risk" behaviors, including getting tattoos.
6. Exercise regularly and often. Even in solitary you can run and jump in place and do push-ups and sit-ups in your cell.
7. Eat regularly and as well as possible. Avoid undercooked eggs, beef and chicken.
8. Stay hydrated and as cool as possible in summer, warm in winter.
9. Accept and love yourself. You are NOT a health hazard; HIV and hep C are not a curse.
10. Laugh every single day.



Beverly Henry is scheduled for release from Central California Women's Facility in October 2009.

"It's never too late to be who you might have been." George Eliot

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Fact or Fiction ?

How many of the following statements are true?

- ⚡ About 5,000 Nova Scotians are infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- ⚡ Hepatitis C is 10 times more prevalent than HIV/AIDS in Atlantic Canada
- ⚡ Approximately 75% who are infected with HCV don't know it
- ⚡ Hepatitis is diagnosed with a simple blood test
- ⚡ Most people do not show any symptoms after infection and can feel quite healthy for many years
- ⚡ More men are infected with HCV than women
- ⚡ Around 15% of people with HCV will clear it on their own without treatment (spontaneous recovery)
- ⚡ Hepatitis A, B & C are the most common in Canada, but there are actually three more: D, E & G. (Hepatitis F is hypothetical but never substantiated)
- ⚡ Hepatitis A & B are easily preventable with a vaccination

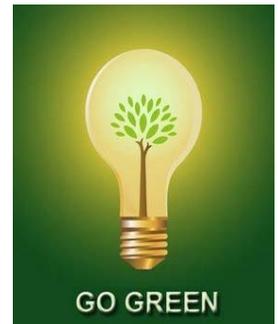
All of the above are factual. Please visit our website for more information.

Going Green – Paper Versus Email

Community Connections would like to be as green as possible. Not only would we save a tree, but we could be saving precious dollars – money that could be put towards important programming. If you are receiving a paper edition of this issue and would like to have it sent electronically, please email Info@HepatitisOutreach.com.

If you receive a paper edition, please ensure we have your correct mailing address. If you would like more than one copy for your office or waiting room, we'll be happy to send them to you. And remember, we always have a full colour version on our website.

Thanks for helping us to be more environmentally friendly and cost effective. And please recycle the paper copies whenever possible.



About The Society

The Hepatitis Outreach Society is a volunteer-driven, charitable organization committed to community capacity and development, health promotion, public awareness, and implementation of social support networks throughout Nova Scotia for those infected, affected and at-risk of developing hepatitis.

Working with volunteers and community partners, the Hepatitis Outreach Society strives to educate Nova Scotians about hepatitis and its prevention, reduce social stigmatization and isolation, and prevent the spread of hepatitis.

Our work would not be possible without the commitment and dedication of our volunteers, members and donors. Please contact us to discuss how you can make a difference.

Get Involved! Get Connected! Volunteer!