

CAPITAL HEALTH: TRANSLATION

In the fall of 2010 Capital Health launched a new telephone "Language Line" service – an interpretation service that provides instant access to interpreters in more than 170 languages.

Language Line provides the advantage of immediate interpretation and is available to family doctors who have not had access to interpretation services until now.

For more information search "interpreter services" at www.cdha.nshealth.ca

What is Autoimmune Hepatitis?

Autoimmune hepatitis is a disease in which the body's immune system attacks liver cells. This immune response causes inflammation of the liver, also called hepatitis. Researchers think a genetic factor may make some people more susceptible to autoimmune diseases. About 70 percent of those with autoimmune hepatitis are female.

The disease is usually quite serious and, if not treated, gets worse over time. Autoimmune hepatitis is typically chronic, meaning it can last for years, and can lead to cirrhosis—scarring and hardening—of the liver. Eventually, liver failure can result.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- A Letter From Anne* 2
- AGM Announcement* 2
- Genotypes Explained* 3
- New Mission Statement* 3
- Lucky Duck Draw* 4
- A Teens Story contd.* 4

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: A VACCINE FOR HEPATITIS C?

MONTREAL – Scientists are zeroing in on a promising vaccine to treat hepatitis c, an international symposium was told in Montreal.

Three preliminary clinical trials in England are showing that a so-called therapeutic vaccine can boost the immune response in those infected with the hepatitis C virus. Still, a viable vaccine is a decade away, said Paul Klenerman, a University of Oxford physician researcher who is conducting the trials.

"Other vaccine trials have been done already, but ours is the first where we're treating people (with drugs) and giving them the vaccine at the same time," he said. "What's possible is that you can have a good drug that can get most of the virus, but you might still need a bit more immune response to tidy it all up, because what you don't want to do is have all these drugs suppress it and then it comes back again, which is typically what happens." Hence the need for a therapeutic vaccine, he added.

The Oxford trials of about 100 people have shown an increased immune response in T cells. Hepatitis C, first identified as a virus in 1989, is estimated to affect 300,000 Canadians. About 20 per cent of people infected are able to clear the virus, HCV, from their bodies. However, the balance must live with chronic hepatitis. Drugs such as interferon-alpha-2b and ribavirin are effective in the long run in slightly more than half of patients with chronic hepatitis.

Many Canadians contracted hepatitis C as a result of tainted blood transfusions from 1980 to 1990. Today, IV drug users are at the greatest risk of HCV infection. Alain Lamarre, a professor in immunology at the INRS-Institut Armand-Frappier in Laval, Que., and chairman of the symposium, said he sees great potential in therapeutic HCV vaccines. "People with chronic hepatitis C – if they are not treated – accumulate tremendous amounts of virus circulating in their bodies," Lamarre said. "The first goal is to reduce that to a minimal level, and therapeutic vaccines would help."

The symposium was organized by Immunology Montreal, a non-profit organization that promotes education and research.

By Aaron Derfel, Postmedia News
The Montreal Gazette, November 22, 2010

AUTOIMMUNE HEPATITIS: A TEEN'S PERSONAL STORY

In the spring of ninth grade, I had a routine blood test that yielded some unexpected results. According to the blood test, my liver enzymes were unusually high. It was decided after many more blood tests, doctor appointments, and a liver biopsy that I have autoimmune hepatitis. This came as a huge shock to me as I felt perfectly normal and had always been healthy. Now, I am more educated about autoimmune hepatitis and know that the cause of the disease is often unknown.

My family was also quite taken back by the diagnosis. They have become more protective of me since and are now paranoid when it comes to my health. I have also told a few of my closest friends who have been quite understanding and respect the limitations that come along with my disease.

contd. on pg 4

FIRST PERSON: A LETTER FROM ANNE

In May of 2010 at an Atlantic conference on hepatitis I met one of our members Anne—who I felt had a story that other members would like to hear. Anne agreed to write me letters to share in Community Connections. The letter below is the first, in what I hope will be a series, of Anne's story. CG

Hi Colin,

Thank you for waiting for my story. I'm not one for writing but as I promised I am going to do the best I can.

There are so many things going through my head since I've been treated. I am recalling many things as I sit and write to you and I'd like to thank you so much for that, being there. I remember going to the doctors and so many of them had signs stating that you can only make one complaint at a time. As I became sicker with hep c.

When I put all the signs together in my head they were being treated separately but in fact they were all mostly signs of hep C. I do remember how tired I was (sleepy) but most of the time my hep c symptoms were mistaken for something else.

I think the hardest thing about being sick and not knowing it is that after a while I just started hiding everything. My oldest son, Ryan, when he was young and didn't want to cry, he'd say; "you're giving me a crying headache." Someone said to me that I complain so often about headaches that is why he'd say that. I'm not sure if it was said to be mean, but sure felt that way at the time.

The worse thing that happened was that I knew that I was losing my mind and there was nothing I could do about it. I did give up going to doctors at one point because I thought I was wasting the doctors time. I had mixed feelings when I found out I was hep c positive I was both glad and upset, glad to finally know that there was really something wrong and upset because I figured I was going to die.

I sure hope that my story helps others to cope with their life living with hep c or maybe even help someone else that may not even know they have it. I've been sick most of my life and I never knew what was wrong with me.

I raised the boys telling them there was something wrong and the doctors couldn't find what was wrong so they had to learn to work around my health. I made sure that the boys were always looked after and it kept me going. There were times over the years that I had four alarm clocks just so I'd be up to get the boys out to school. After, I'd go back to bed and sleep so I could make meals and do homework etc later with the boys.

The one big difference in my life now is adjusting to having more time now that I am one and a half years hep c free. That doesn't mean I don't have to cope with the side affects from the virus and or treatment.

I'm looking forward to writing more often.



Anne

mark your calendar for the
HepNS Annual General Meeting

on Saturday May 14, 2011

9:30 am at Centennial Bldg Victoria General Hospital
1278 Tower Rd., 9th floor Room 929

ASK AN EXPERT: WHAT IS MEANT BY HEPATITIS C GENOTYPES?

Hepatitis C Virus is easier to speak about as a single organism, but there are actually several different types of Hepatitis C known as Genotypes - and even further subgroups.

Genotype refers to the genetic makeup of the organism, usually with reference to specific characteristics. There is ongoing research to further define various genotypes but in the Halifax Hepatology Clinic we refer to them as 1 through 6 types.

Even within these genotypes there are many different types. The individual viruses differ from each other ever so slightly. Such viral differences are not significant enough to form another sub-type but instead form what's known as quasi-species.

The virus has evolved over thousand years, and continues to evolve. This continual change is one reason HCV so difficult to treat. Through its evolving the virus creates different genotypes. HCV genotypes 1 though 6 can be broken down into subgroups—and where globally these genotypes are more commonly found:

1a - North & South America	3a - South Asia
1b - Europe and Asia	4a - Egypt
2a - Japan and China	4c - Central Africa
2b - Northern Europe	5a - South Africa
2c - Western and Southern Europe	6a - Hong Kong, Macau and Vietnam

Genotypes and successful treatment are influenced by many factors such as the duration of a person's HCV infection, their viral load, age, grade of liver inflammation or stage of fibrosis and alcohol intake all can play an important role in determining an individual's responses to interferon treatment. A person's HCV genotype influences their response to Pegylated interferon-ribavirin combination treatment. For genotype 1,4,5,6 we estimate a 50% chance of virus eradication and genotype 2,3 we estimate a 80% chance of eradication. Through research studies there are newer treatments coming that give higher percentages of successful treatment.

Submitted by – Carla Burgess Nurse Practitioner Hepatology Halifax Nova Scotia

If you have questions that you would like answered, please submit them to Newsletter@HepatitisOutreach.com

HEPNS: DEFINING OUR MISSION

At our January meeting the HepNS Board of Directors took an opportunity to clarify our Mission and Goals:

Mission Statement

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

Goals

Reduce the stigma, isolation and discrimination associated with hepatitis.

Reduce transmission rates through preventative education.

Promote healthy living through information and support for people living with hepatitis.

See our website for information about our Guiding Principles, Programs and Services: www.HepatitisOutreach.com

ABOUT US

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

Office Location

2973 Oxford Street,
Halifax NS B3L 2W3

Mailing Address

PO Box 29120 RPO Halifax Shopping
Centre, Halifax NS B3L 4T8

Phone

Local Halifax 902.420.1767
Toll Free in NS 1.800.521.0572
Fax 902.463.6725

Email info@hepatitisoutreach.com

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

Board of Directors:

Sandra Low, Chair
Wanda MacDonald, Treasurer
Carla Burgess
Heather d'Entremont
Jeff Lewis
Juanita MacPhee
Dr Marie Laryea

Staff

Colin Green, Executive Director

LUCKY DUCK FUNDRAISER

From January 10th through til March 18th HepNS is participating in Recreation Nova Scotia's Luck Duck Lotto. For a \$1.00 ticket you have the chance to win:

First Prize: \$3000

Second Prize: \$500

Third Prize: Weekend Get-away for Two at Digby Pines Golf Resort and Spa

You can purchase tickets through any HepNS board member or contact the office. Your support is appreciated.

TEEN'S STORY CONTD.

Autoimmune hepatitis is essentially when your immune system recognizes your liver as a foreign object, and attacks it. Luckily, I have responded well to a fairly low dose of medication and have been able to avoid the much harsher treatment of steroids. Since my medication works by suppressing my immune system, I have to get vaccinated for everything and I often get whatever illness is going around.

Since I never showed any serious symptoms of autoimmune hepatitis, the disease has not had a huge impact on my daily life. Although, autoimmune hepatitis is a chronic illness, so I will be dealing with it for the rest of my life. The disease is known to go through highs and lows, in and out of remission. Since I do have this condition, I have to be careful about what medications I take and make sure I get checked out if I have a fever or any other symptoms (such as jaundice, fatigue, or skin rashes).

Right now, I am in grade 12, and my enzymes are still a bit higher than normal. I take my medication daily and go for blood tests every three months. Currently, the effect of autoimmune hepatitis I notice the most is when it comes to alcohol. Sadly, the high school social scene revolves heavily around drinking and partying. I am strongly discouraged from drinking so I do not have the same kind of weekends as many of my friends. This has made special nights like Halloween and New Year's Eve some of the most dreaded days on my calendar. I know that not being able to drink alcohol is not a big deal but it sure feels like it is in high school.

Sarah

We Want To Hear From You:

First person accounts are the most popular articles in our newsletter. To share a story, contact Newsletter@HepatitisOutreach.com



THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION !

NAME : _____

ADDRESS: _____

DONATION: \$10.00 \$25.00 \$50.00 other \$ _____

Please send me further information about HepNS

I would like to make this donation in memory / honor of _____

Your support allows HepNS to provide valuable education, information and support across the province of Nova Scotia.

An income tax receipt will be issued for donations of \$10.00 or more.

Donations can also be given on our website or through Visa and Mastercard by calling 902-420-1767

Please make cheques payable to Hepatitis Outreach Society and mail to:

**PO Box 29120 RPO Halifax Shopping Centre
Halifax NS B3L 4T8**

charitable registration # 885513523RR0001