

Health Awareness

Chronic Hepatitis C Affects 3.5 Million People In The United States, Yet Half Are Unaware They Are Infected

(NAPSA)—In 2001, William Yarbrough was looking forward to his future. He had relocated his family to Durham, N.C., to pursue his dream job and adopted two young children—growing his family of four to six. He decided to visit his doctor to find out why he was feeling constantly fatigued and was shocked when the results of a simple blood test showed he was infected with chronic hepatitis C (HCV). Like so many others diagnosed with this potentially life-threatening liver disease, William was blind-sided; he wanted to see his children grow old.

Stories like William's aren't uncommon because HCV is highly infectious and the most prevalent chronic blood-borne infection in the United States, affecting nearly 3.5 million Americans. Baby boomers—born between 1945 and 1965—account for 81 percent of adults with this virus. HCV can be spread via contaminated needles from tattoos, needle sticks or intravenous drug use. Before widespread screening of the blood supply in 1992, the virus was often spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

African Americans at High Risk, but this “Silent Disease” is Often Ignored

In the United States, HCV is more prevalent among African Americans than any other demographic and is a significant public health problem. African Americans represent only 12 percent of the population, but make up approximately 22 percent of Americans living with HCV. They are also more than twice as likely to be infected with HCV as the general population and experience higher rates of HCV-related cirrhosis, liver cancer and death.

Because HCV is often a “silent disease,” about 50 percent of people infected are unaware. Since chronic infection often has no noticeable symptoms or, as in William's case, symptoms don't appear until many years later—testing for HCV is vitally important.



African Americans are twice as likely to be infected with hepatitis C as the general U.S. population and face more than double the rate for HCV-related deaths.

There is Hope—HCV Can Be Cured

After his diagnosis with HCV in 2001, William enrolled in several clinical trials in an attempt to treat his disease—yet nothing worked. Now, thanks to recent scientific advances, highly effective treatment options are available. These advances are especially important for African Americans, who experienced lower treatment response rates with previous therapies. The newer treatments are able to cure the disease in more than 90 percent of patients—meaning the virus is undetectable in the blood when checked three months or more after treatment is completed. Treatment success rates are now just as high in African Americans as they are in other demographics.

“When I was diagnosed with HCV, I was worried I would never be cured, but I learned the importance of keeping a positive attitude,” said William, who is now cured and, as a result, has gained a new perspective on life. “I'll continue to see my children live and grandchildren grow up. If you have HCV or believe you are at-risk, take action. Get tested and get treated.”

To learn more about HCV, visit HepCHope.com.