

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

Side Effect Management: HCV Treatment and Depression: For Family and Friends

Lucinda Porter, RN

Depression is a common side effect of treatment for hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. Watching a loved one experience depression can be frightening. Feeling helpless is a common reaction to someone else's depression. If you are a friend or family member, you are already helping the person you are concerned about by reading this. By gaining information and tools, you can be a great source of power and support.

What You Can Do

The experience of undergoing HCV treatment is somewhat unique and patients frequently state that the only people who understand them are other HCV patients with treatment experience. Although you may not be able to completely empathize, you can be supportive by showing compassion and patience.

It may be helpful to find support for the depressed person. Encourage him or her to speak to his or her doctor. Appropriate diagnosis and treatment are essential. Treatment for depression may take anywhere from 2 to 8 weeks to be fully effective. You can encourage your friend or family member

to stick with it until the medications start to work or to talk to their doctor about alternatives if there is no improvement.

Important Note: Do not ignore remarks of suicide or hurting self or others. These need to be reported immediately to the patient's doctor or other professional. If a suicide attempt is imminent, call 911.

If there are any HCV support groups available, encourage your loved one to attend. You may offer to drive him or her to the group. If the group is open to everyone, perhaps volunteer to attend it with him or her.

You may want to encourage the depressed person to go for a walk, to the movies, or do other activities that previously gave them pleasure. If you are refused, do not push it. It may be enough to just sit and listen to the radio or watch TV together. Some patients have difficulty reading during treatment, so perhaps listening to an audio book might interest you both.

HCV patients are sometimes irritable during treatment. Try not to take this personally. Keep your expectations to a minimum. Do not expect a depressed HCV patient to "snap out of it" or to be able to turn the mood around by positive thinking. Medication-induced depression is influenced by physical factors and all the willpower in the world will not make it go away.

Important Note: If you feel that you could be physically harmed by the patient, get immediate help. Do not put yourself in harm's way.

Sexuality

Patients commonly report decreased sexual interest during treatment. Some antidepressant medications can also cause some sexual problems as well as decreased libido. This will return to normal after HCV and antidepressant medications are stopped. Patients should never stop medications without speaking to their doctors first.

Take Care of Yourself

Make sure you take care of yourself. It is not necessary for you to give up your own needs during this time. If you need to, find someone that you can talk to and will support you. Engage in activities that give you pleasure. If your sex life is affected, try to find ways to give and receive physical affection with your loved one. Remember that HCV treatment is not forever. It will end and so will the side effects.

Disclaimer: The diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric and other medical disorders requires a trained medical professional. Information contained in this article is intended for educational purposes only. It should NOT be used as a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment of any mental/psychiatric disorders. Please consult a medical professional if the information here leads you to believe you or someone you know may have a psychiatric or other medical illness.

Portions of this FactSheet are excerpts written by Lucinda Porter, RN and Eric Dieperink, MD which appeared in Coping with Depression and Hepatitis C published by the Hepatitis C Support Project. Permission to use granted by the authors.

Resources

Canadian Mental Health Association
www.cmha.ab.ca

Centre for Suicide Prevention (Canada)
Suite 320, 1202 Centre Street S.E.
Calgary, AB T2G 5A5
(403) 245-3900
www.suicideinfo.ca

The International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression (iFred)
www.ifred.org/
1-800-784-2433

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
www.nami.org
Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201
(800) 950-NAMI (6264)

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov
Public Information and Communication Branch
6001 Executive Boulevard Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-966
(301) 443-4513
Toll Free: (866) 227 NIMH (6464)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) SUICIDE or (800) 784-2433

**Visit the HCV Advocate
Web Site:
www.hcvadvocate.org**

Below are just some of the publications and services you can find at www.hcvadvocate.org:

- HCV Advocate Monthly Newsletter (English)
- Educational materials in English, Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, Tagalog, Hmong, Korean and Somali
- Medical Writers' Circle
- Hepatitis Journal Review
- Weekly News Review
- Disability & Benefits Column
- Hepatitis B information
- HIV/HCV Coinfection information
- Support Group Listings for USA, Canada and Elsewhere
- Physician Locator (USA)
- Links to Clinical Trials
- Links to other Helpful Organisations
- Event Listings
- Fact Sheet series: (English, French and Spanish)
 - *Easy C Facts
 - *Basics
 - *HCSP Fact Sheets

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

• hcspFACTsheet •

A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

Executive Director

Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications

Alan Franciscus

Design

Paula Fener

Production

C.D. Mazoff, PhD

Contact information:

Hepatitis C Support Project
PO Box 427037
San Francisco, CA 94142-7037

alanfranciscus@hcvadvocate.org

The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project • a nonprofit organization for HCV education, support and advocacy • © 2009 Hepatitis C Support Project • Reprint permission is granted and encouraged with credit to the Hepatitis C Support Project.



HCV ADVOCATE
www.hcvadvocate.org