

Hepatitis Awareness and its Importance

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Hepatitis as inflammation of the liver, is caused by various factors such as viral infections, alcohol consumption, medications, autoimmune disorders, accumulation of mineral elements and obesity. A variety of these offending agents especially viral infections could be potentially preventable by awareness of general population. The World Health organization (WHO) and Centre for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that currently, more than 500 million people are living with chronic viral hepatitis. Of those, nearly 1 million die every year due to consequences of hepatitis like cirrhosis or liver cancer. It has been estimated that 57% of cases with liver cirrhosis and 78% primary hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) result from chronic hepatitis B (HBV) or C (HCV) infection. Individuals with chronic hepatitis are also at risk of developing a wide range of liver related complications, worst being liver cancer and death [1-4].

As viral Hepatitis is a preventable disease, the public awareness campaigns should aim to not only dispelling the myths, stigma and misunderstanding associated with hepatitis, but also to prove the fact that safe practices can prevent hepatitis. Align awareness campaigns should focus on developing contents for various channels of communication and the content pedagogy to achieve behavioral changes to ensure and guaranty successfulness.

It is clearly necessary to promote global awareness campaigns at the general population level and achieving this aim mandates not only active involvement of patients groups, but also physicians, Ministry of Health and specially social media to empower the public with trustworthy and actionable information [5,6].

Most people who living with hepatitis are unaware of their infection [7]. By increasing awareness, many of these deaths could be preventable and for achieving this goal, the following steps would be a reasonable approach:

- **Step 1:** Identification of target populations at risk and encouraging screening to reduce the risk.
- **Step 2:** Notification to the route of transmission. Hepatitis A is typically transmitting through ingestion of contaminated water and/or food or contact with someone carrying the infection [8]. The main routes of Hepatitis B and C transmission are use of contaminated needles, unsafe sex with infected partners and during childbirth if the mother be infected [9].
- **Step 3:** General vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the hepatitis A vaccine for not only children more than 1 year of age but also Travelers, Men who have sex with men, Users of injection and non-injection drugs, Persons with clotting-factor disorders, Persons who work with nonhuman primates, Persons who anticipate close personal contact with an international adoptee, Persons with chronic liver disease and Persons experiencing homelessness [10]. General vaccination for the hepatitis has been commenced since more than 20y ago in many countries [11,12]. Currently no vaccine exists for HCV; however, individuals can reduce their risk of infection by avoiding activities that put them in contact with infected blood. In particular, it is important to avoid any type of injected drugs.
- **Step 4:** Education. Hepatitis has been dubbed a “silent epidemic” because millions of people are living with it unknowingly [13]. About 3.5 million Americans are currently living with hepatitis C and roughly, half are unaware of their infection.

As a healthcare professional, it is vital that you encourage hepatitis screenings and vaccinations. There are a number of ways to go about spreading information: social media, posters, pamphlets, talking to patients, and encouraging colleagues to do the same. Do not solely focus on the risks; also explain why screenings and vaccinations are necessary and effective. There are also educational resources that your patients can take advantage of them such as the CDC's 5-minute hepatitis risk assessment [14]. Also, to stay informed on outbreaks across the United States, monitor the CDC website.

Although World Hepatitis Day takes place just once a year, you can get involved year-round and help spread awareness through various means. The World Hepatitis Alliance offers campaign materials, such as posters and social media graphics, which you can use to spread the message. You can use this month-long opportunity to shine a light on hepatitis and suppose how many lives we can save by raising global awareness about hepatitis [15-19].

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