

Hepatitis – The Silent Epidemic

Disparities in health-care access, health outcomes, and certain chronic diseases have been well documented for African Americans in comparison with non-Hispanic whites. There is a new silent

epidemic on the scene affecting African Americans related to common blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) that has garnered little attention. Worldwide, 500 million people are living with either chronic hepatitis B or C. Although this is far higher than the prevalence of HIV or any cancer, hepatitis is often ignored,



HEPATITIS FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL

awareness is inexplicably low, and the majority of those infected are often unaware and can unknowingly transmit the virus to other people.

Each year 80,000 new infections of viral hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D and E occur. While it is a leading infectious cause of death for an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 Americans each year, viral hepatitis remains virtually un-

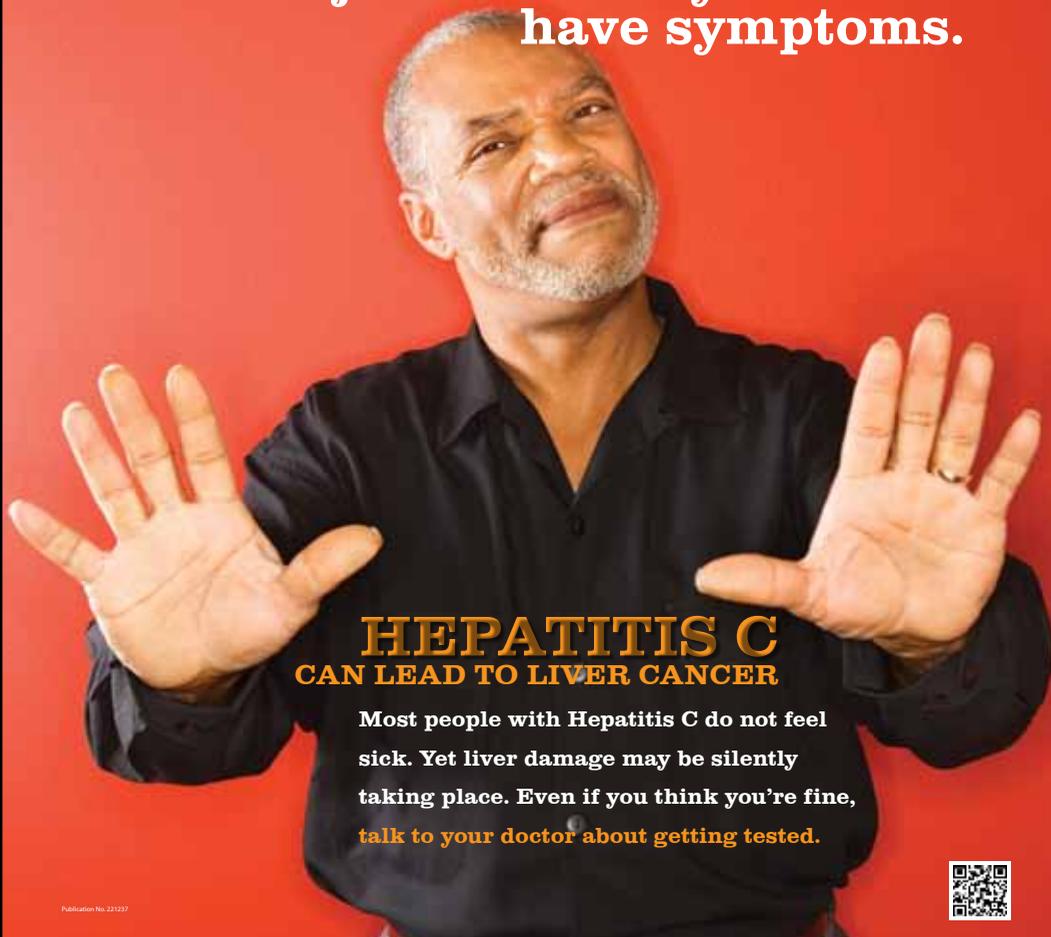
known to the public and more specifically for at risk populations, including African Americans.

Hepatitis, defined as inflammation of the liver, is most often caused by a virus and the most common types are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is more prevalent among African Americans than among persons of any other racial group in the United States. However, little data is available on the history and treatment of hepatitis C for African Americans. All three of these viruses cause severe short term hepatitis infections. Symptoms for all types of viral hepatitis can



▲ Liver Cancer Image from Hepatitis B.

Don't say
“I'm all good”
just because you don't
have symptoms.



**HEPATITIS C
CAN LEAD TO LIVER CANCER**

Most people with Hepatitis C do not feel sick. Yet liver damage may be silently taking place. Even if you think you're fine, talk to your doctor about getting tested.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention



www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis

include one or more of the following:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

The hepatitis B virus and hepatitis C virus can also cause chronic hepatitis, in which the infection becomes lifelong. Chronic hepatitis can lead to scarring of the liver also known as cirrhosis, liver failure, and liver cancer. Furthermore, viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer and can ultimately lead to liver transplantation. Many people who are infected with chronic viral hepatitis often have no symptoms. In fact, people can be infected with chronic viral hepatitis and not feel or show symptoms for upwards of 20 or 30 years. When and if symptoms appear, they can mimic the flu and ultimately lead to serious liver damage.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends anyone who has been exposed to blood through blood transfusion, non-sterile equipment, tattooing, or sharing a needle while injecting illegal drugs should be tested for both hepati-

tis B and C. The hepatitis C recommendations propose all U.S. baby boomers, those born between 1945 and 1965 get a blood test to determine if they are infected with hepatitis C. The hepatitis B vaccine provides excellent protection against hepatitis B infection and the vaccine is covered at no cost under Medicare Part B for certain eligible individuals at high or intermediate risk.

Patient advocacy groups such as Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI), and agencies across the federal government are working together to implement the Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis. The Plan's main goals include: increase the proportion of Americans who are aware of their viral hepatitis infection; reduce the number of new cases of hepatitis C infection; and eliminate mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B.

The Hepatitis Foundation International (www.Hepatitis-Foundation.org) is a 501 c 3 non-profit organization established in 1994 dedicated to promoting health and wellness, reducing the incidence of preventable liver-related chronic diseases and lifestyles that negatively impact the liver including; obesity, diabetes, hepatitis, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular disease and fatty/liver cancer. ■