

Get tested for Hep C, local woman urges

By Nelia Raposo
Special to The IFP

An Acton woman is making good on a promise to spread the word after receiving treatment that cured her of hepatitis C two years ago.

Sharon Rider got the disease from a tainted blood transfusion during spine surgery as a 16-year-old and had been carrying the virus, with no symptoms, for 23 years before it was diagnosed.

Meanwhile, she'd gotten married and had two kids, never knowing she was putting her family at risk of getting the disease.

It was routine pre-surgery blood testing that informed her, at age 39, she was living with the silent killer virus.

Hepatitis C attacks the liver and can lead to liver cancer, liver failure or death. It is contagious and spreads through contact with infected blood.

I had the surgery and every-

thing went well, but I needed to get my blood tested every six months. I was fine for many years. It was years before I really had symptoms. I just remember being tired. I was tired, really tired. I just thought, this is the life of a working mom, Rider, 54, said.

I vowed to my husband, if this works, I am going to tell anyone who will listen, she said of the drug treatment that cured her.

My mission is to encourage people to get the blood test.

At 52 years old I was cured. It is a miracle, Rider says.

But before this miracle, she had tried another treatment for six months that made her feel worse with no results.

It felt like chemo. I was sick all the time. It was horrible, she said.

The drugs are expensive but she was covered under her employment health benefits so cost was not an obstacle, Rider said.

A recent *Toronto Star* article listed the price tag of Hepatitis C

treatment, using Sovaldi or Harvoni pills by Gilead Sciences Inc., at \$60,000 for a 12-week course.

But those drugs only target a few genotypes of the virus: Harvoni (genotype 1) and Sovaldi (genotypes 1, 2 and 3).

In July, Health Canada approved another Gilead Sciences Inc. Hep C drug, sold under the brand name Epclusa. It is a once-daily pill taken for 12 weeks that can rid the body of all six strains of hepatitis C.

The medication is also known by its generic chemical designation sofosbuvir-velpatasvir. Epclusa costs \$900 (U.S.) a pill or almost \$75,000 for a 12-week course.

There is a lot of stigma around Hep C because of assumptions you get it from using illegal drugs and needles. For me, I was a little girl going for surgery to correct a curved spine, Rider said of how she got the virus through tainted blood.

A study published in the journal *Lancet Infectious Diseases* this spring, suggests the peak of the hepatitis C epidemic occurred about 1950, when many baby boomers were children.

One of the study's researchers says it is most likely the virus was spread by medical practices at the time, explaining that Hepatitis C hadn't yet been identified and injections and blood transfusions were given employing reusable glass-tube syringes and metal needles, which were subject to contamination despite boiling.

Dr. Morris Sherman, chair of the Canadian Liver Foundation, and the man that treated Rider, said Canada and other countries have committed to eliminating Hepatitis C by 2030, but to get there treatment rates need to be higher.

Having a therapy that works for all genotypes will make treatment easier for both patients and physicians to manage, he said.

But it must be accessible, regardless of where someone lives or their ability to pay.

An article in the *Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology* published May 2014, says that health care costs associated with the disease will increase 60 per cent by 2032.

Undiagnosed chronic Hepatitis C can be dangerous and weighs heavily on patients and the health care system, but thanks to research, testing and new curative treatments, the life-threatening and costly consequences associated with it are largely preventable, said Sherman.

It is critical that members of high-risk groups understand their increased likelihood of having hepatitis C, and get tested without delay so they can be connected with a physician to discuss treatment options if needed.

To learn more about Hepatitis C, visit the Canadian Liver Foundation at liver.ca

No one injured in Faludon Dr. house fire

Residents of a home on Faludon Dr. in Georgetown were safely evacuated last Wednesday afternoon (Aug. 10) following a fire at the rear of the structure.

Halton Hills Fire Department responded to a call at 4:39 p.m. to the home, located beside Centennial Public School.

Fire crews were able to quickly extinguish the fire in a backyard shed, which was a short distance from the residence, and flames spread into the home. There were two people at home at the time.

The fire was knocked down before it could get into the roof, said HHFD Asst. Deputy Chief Bruce Morrison, but there was substantial smoke and

water damage inside. Damage is estimated at approximately \$50,000.

An adjacent home's eavesdrop was said to be damaged by heat a grass fire in the backyard.

No cause of the fire had been determined but it is believed to have started in the shed and is not considered suspicious.

Heavy smoke could be seen from a couple of kilometres away.

Morrison added that Halton EMS was on scene as a precaution due to the hot and humid temperatures. A heat alert had been issued by Environment Canada and the firefighters were placed in a rotation to rest in the HHFD's Rehabilitation Unit.



Deputy Chief Harry Olivieri (left) of the Halton Hills Fire Department and firefighter Shawn Barnes survey the damage caused by a blaze that destroyed a backyard shed last week and spread to the inside of the home, as well as the house next door. Photo by Eamonn Maher

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