

HEALTH

New hepatitis C treatments available

Special to Sentinel-Voice

About 30 to 40 percent of the 4 million Americans diagnosed with hepatitis C aren't yet candidates for treatment, and this has caused frustration and misunderstandings, says a Stanford liver specialist.

"Many patients have come to us asking for one of the few experimental treatments available, but for the one-third of patients who have no active symptoms and no evidence of liver damage, these treatments may do more harm than good," says Dr. Joanne Imperial, assistant professor of medicine in the Liver Transplant Program at Stanford University Medical Center.

Imperial explains that hepatitis C is a very slow-acting viral disease that eventually may cause cirrhosis of the liver. "The disease can remain

without symptoms for 20 or 30 years. When a patient has a hepatitis risk factor — including intravenous (IV) drug use and exposure to infected blood — we often run an antibody test. Patients who are diagnosed via the test but whose liver enzymes are found to be normal should not at this time be treated. We literally have nothing to treat, because the current treatments can actually trigger symptoms and hepatic [liver] inflammation among persons who don't have these yet," Imperial explains.

Imperial says patients who have no symptoms and no sign of liver damage should work with their primary care physicians to monitor the disease.

Researchers are developing promising new drugs all the time, and most patients should take comfort in knowing that

by the time they need a drug, better treatments are likely to be available, Imperial says.

For patients with liver damage, existing treatments include the use of interferons, which are natural proteins that stimulate the immune system to recognize and fight infection. Imperial says interferons help about 10 to 15 percent of patients.

Several experimental drugs, which work in much the same way as protease inhibitors given to HIV-positive patients, may be more effective when administered in conjunction with interferon, and research to develop such drug "cocktails" is under way. Protease inhibitors prevent the virus from replicating.

Liver transplantation is a final, but usually effective, option for persons with advanced stages of hepatitis C.

Imperial says that because of its long dormancy, hepatitis C may be grossly under-diagnosed among healthy persons who continue active lives for years or decades with no sign of the disease.

An estimated 70 to 75 percent of IV drug users are infected, but health care workers are also vulnerable because of the risk of being stuck by a contaminated needle.

In the home, sharing toothbrushes, razors or even nail clippers with an infected person can spread the disease, Imperial notes.

"At this time the best advice we can give people at potential risk is to get tested," she says. "Once diagnosed, they should keep a close watch on their condition and, most important, take care not to spread the disease."

Plan your child's doctor trip

Special to Sentinel-Voice

For small children, a favorite stuffed animal and a story or two read in advance can demystify a potentially scary trip to the doctor, says Stanford pediatrician Dr. Fernando Mendoza.

"If you give children a chance to understand a few basic things about what they might expect, the visit will be much less frightening and stressful for them — and for the parents as well," says Mendoza, an associate professor of pediatrics and chief of the division of general pediatrics at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford.

A number of children's books, available at bookstores or public libraries, describe what happens at doctors' offices and at hospitals and identify the types of people the child might be seeing — the doctor, nurse or therapist.

Before the visit, "talk specifically about the caretakers your child will be seeing," Mendoza says. For example, you might inform your child that doctors and nurses are the people who get close to patients, often touching or probing. Remember that young children can be quite surprised when someone other than their parent comes over and picks them up, touches their bodies or otherwise gets close. Telling children that the nurse or doctor will be very helpful can make them feel less apprehensive.

"And letting children bring something they are familiar with, such as a stuffed animal, provides comfort and continuity between the home and the unfamiliar world of the hospital or doctor's office," Mendoza says.

A children's hospital or a pediatric facility is usually best equipped to deal with children's fears, says Mendoza. For example, many children's hospitals have special amenities, such as toys, or even medical equipment that makes it easier and faster to evaluate children.

Nominees sought for disabled employee of the year

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The search is on for Nevada's Disabled Employees of the Year and Outstanding Employer of People with Disabilities. Winners will be announced Oct. 29 at the 20th Annual Governor's Awards Banquet at Sam's Town Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

"The contest emphasizes the abilities of employees who have displayed exemplary

work performance for their employers," said Gov. Bob Miller. "The awards highlight the nominees' contributions in the workplace and the community."

Categories include Outstanding Male and Outstanding Female, plus runners-up to both honorees. One large and one small business will also be selected as exceptional in employing

people with disabilities.

Nomination forms are available by calling the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities: (702) 486-4318

(voice) or (702) 486-4393 (TTY) in Las Vegas or (702) 688-1111 (voice and TTY) in Reno.

Deadline for entries is noon, Friday, Oct. 17, 1997.

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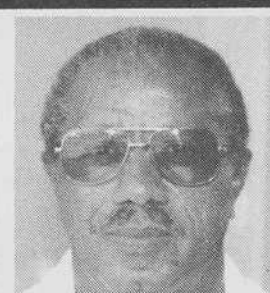
UNLV

intramural field (swenson & harmon)

no coolers please, lawn chairs & blankets are welcome

Health Fair
This Saturday, Oct. 4, 1997 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. there will be a mammography and prostate screening. The health fair, sponsored by the Urban Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the American Cancer Society and the Professional Black Women's Alliance, will be held at 1048 W. Owens Avenue. For further information please contact Faye Duncan-Daniels at 631-0000.

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