



Tuesday, July 26, 2016

VICTORIA TO MARK WORLD HEPATITIS DAY

VICTORIA, BC -- On Thursday, July 28th, Victorians will join millions of people around the world in observing World Hepatitis Day, an international event focused on raising awareness of viral hepatitis and advocating for change in disease prevention and access to testing and treatment.

Approximately 140,000 British Columbians suffer from chronic hepatitis B and C which scar the liver and can go undetected for years, even decades, before damage results in cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, or liver cancer.

In Victoria, a coalition has come together to mark World Hepatitis Day and send a strong message to decision makers that individuals with hepatitis C, a preventable and curable blood-borne virus, should be treated and cured as soon as they are diagnosed. The price of new antiviral drugs to treat hepatitis C is high, \$80,000 to \$100,000 for a course of treatment, and public funding for them is limited. Only individuals with fairly advanced disease are eligible for PharmaCare and other coverage for these drugs.

“All British Columbians with hepatitis C should have the right to an early cure,” says Leslie Robinson, Hepatitis C Educator with AIDS Vancouver Island. “Why wait until a person is really sick, needs a liver transplant, or has liver cancer? Treatment at diagnosis will stop needless suffering and avoid the health care costs associated with advancing liver disease. We have the means to cure people, so let’s get on with it.”

Robinson also noted out that “BC has learned that early treatment of HIV not only supports the health of the person being treated, but also prevents further transmission of the virus. While BC has been a leader in providing universal treatment for HIV, it has not yet applied this lesson to hepatitis C. In BC, the annual rate of newly identified cases of hepatitis C is about 50% higher than the national average. Early treatment of hepatitis C is a fundamental part of prevention.”¹

At 12 noon on July 28, people who have or are affected by viral hepatitis will be joined by AIDS Vancouver Island, HepCBC, Vancouver Island PWA Society, Peers Victoria, Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, and the Society of Living Illicit Drug Users at Victoria’s Centennial Square to walk together in solidarity to the steps of the Parliament Buildings where speakers will talk about hepatitis C, its effect on their lives, and current barriers to early treatment.

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¹ Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Services. *British Columbia Annual Summary of Reportable Diseases 2013*. Vancouver: BC Centre for Disease Control; 2014.

At the same time, AIDS Vancouver Island will have an information table at the main branch of the Greater Victoria Public Library on July 28 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Later in the day, starting at 8:30 pm, the Parliament Buildings will be lit up in red and yellow, colours representing the blood and the liver, and identified with hepatitis C advocacy and activism.

See attached:

1. World Hepatitis Day 2016 Backgrounder
2. *Access To Hepatitis C Treatment* Action. Hepatitis Canada, Position Statement
3. *Pricing of Hepatitis C Medicines in Canada*. Action Hepatitis Canada, Position Statement

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