

**Dear Editor:**

I am writing this letter as a public service. My husband was diagnosed with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) back in 2003. We knew absolutely nothing about this disease.

So what does this mean? What's HCV? This virus is known as the silent killer. It is unfortunate that most people do not realize they are infected with this virus until the damage is done. Unless you show some of the symptoms, or have not shared with your medical professional your risk behaviors or exposures, you will not randomly be tested for this disease or for HIV.

In Kern County alone, (not necessarily residents) since January 2008 there have been 3936 newly diagnosed individuals. (This includes 5 prisons in the county) This number is up from last year's reports of 2382. Approximately 3.2 million people in the United States are believed to be chronically infected with hepatitis C, or HCV, with the highest incidence among people in their 40s to 60s. Worldwide, approximately 170 million people are believed to be infected.

Hepatitis C is acquired by blood-to-blood contact. Common modes of transmission include

Injection or intranasal drug use, Blood transfusion or organ transplantation before 1992, Kidney dialysis, Needle-stick, Tattoos, body piercing or acupuncture or a High-risk sexual activity (multiple partners) and Maternal to fetal transmission. Other exposures could be something as simple as sharing a tooth brush or razor. HCV is a very strong virus that can live outside the body for a length of time.

For years, hepatitis C has been called the "silent epidemic," because a chronic infection can persist for decades before causing symptoms, such as cirrhosis of the liver. Cirrhosis itself can be fatal, with scarring that impairs liver function and blood circulation, and can lead to liver failure.

Hepatitis C infection is already the leading cause of liver transplants in this country, but now the United States is also experiencing an increase in the rate of HCV-related liver cancer. In fact, "liver cancer is now America's most rapidly increasing form of cancer, and as the epidemic of HCV-infected individuals ages, we're only going to see rates of liver disease get higher and higher," said Robert Lanford, Ph.D., a researcher at Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research and one of the organizers of the upcoming conference.

There are indeed treatments for the disease, and a cure is possible for some. It's not an easy treatment to tolerate, and it doesn't work for everyone. For the others, often a transplant is the only option for long time survival.

In an effort to educate and support those who may be affected I am hosting a Hep-C Awareness/Support Group which will be facilitated by a professional. Everyone is

welcome. The first meeting will be held on election Tuesday 11/4/2008 and again the 1st Tuesday of each month.

All calls will be kept confidential. For more info please call Susan @ 661-205-4396 or email [susansemail63@yahoo.com](mailto:susansemail63@yahoo.com)