

25 July 2017

Hepatitis Awareness Week (24 - 29 July 2017) Ask. Test. Treat.

People living with hepatitis C can now be cured with new, easy-to-take and highly effective treatments. However the challenges are different for hepatitis B, which has no cure and if left untreated, can lead to liver disease and cancer.

During **Hepatitis Awareness Week 24 - 29 2017**, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) is raising awareness about hepatitis within the community; and encouraging people to **ask** their GP to **test** for hepatitis and, if appropriate, **treat** their hepatitis. Ask about having a test and the new available treatments for hepatitis.

Director of the Kirketon Road Centre (KRC), Dr Phill Read, said despite its high prevalence, awareness of hepatitis B and C remains relatively low.

“Hepatitis Awareness Week provides an opportunity for the community to become better informed about hepatitis B and C – how to prevent it, test for it, treat it and now, for Hepatitis C, cure it,” Dr Read said.

“Awareness also encourages people to be tested and gain access to treatment if they need it.”

The number of Australians with hepatitis C related liver disease has more than doubled since 2006 to over 49,000 people in 2015.

Since the availability of interferon-free oral treatments for hepatitis C in March 2016, NSW has already treated, over 11,000 people, which is 14 per cent of the estimated number of people living with hepatitis C in NSW.

With a cure rate of 95 per cent, it is now possible to eliminate hepatitis C as a public health concern in NSW and Australia.

“This is a major shift, and people are experiencing the full benefits of treatment. In almost all cases, people are not only cured of hepatitis C, but are feeling an improvement in energy levels and overall well-being,” Dr Read said.

“Most people with hepatitis C can now be cured in 8-12 weeks, with all-oral tablets, no injections and minimal side-effects.

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“For all people who know they have hepatitis C, there’s no reason why they cannot be living hepatitis C free by this time next year. We have seen this time and time again with our clients at KRC. The impact treatment and healthy lifestyle choices have had on their lives is significant.

“It is vital that we are able to offer hepatitis C treatment to all members of our community, no matter how marginalised, and regardless of current drug use or disease stage.” While hepatitis C can be cured, there remains no cure for hepatitis B. However, people living with both hepatitis B and C can make lifestyle modifications to improve their quality of life.

“Hepatitis B is a totally preventable disease, but the first step in getting the right care is asking for a hepatitis test then being vaccinated against it if not immune. Identifying people living with chronic hepatitis B is also vital, because if people do not know they have hepatitis B then they cannot undertake regular monitoring and won’t be accessing life-saving treatment if they need to,” he said.

“It’s also important for people living with hepatitis to be supported in adopting strategies for healthy living; these can include eating a balanced diet, reducing alcohol consumption, quitting smoking and reducing stress.”

Hepatitis assessment and treatment is available at KRC every day of the week on a drop-in basis. A Healthy Liver Clinic at KRC is held every Thursday from 10.00am – 12.30pm, which can provide focussed hepatitis C testing, assessment and monitoring of liver disease, information and support. KRC has its own portable Fibroscan to assess liver health, and need for hepatitis C and B treatment, which can be initiated at KRC and monitored by KRC’s doctors and nurses.

KRC also takes the Fibroscan to outreach clinics, where staff can assess, monitor and provide information regarding viral hepatitis and initiate treatment for clients who may not access primary or secondary health clinics such as people who are homeless, at-risk young people, sex workers and people who inject drugs.

SESLHD have planned a range of events and are supporting various local events throughout Hepatitis Awareness Week to raise awareness about hepatitis locally.

Staff from KRC will be on hand to answer questions and provide information on hepatitis during Hepatitis Awareness Week; and will also host a hepatitis cook up, quiz and Fibroscan raffle blitz on Tuesday, 25 July from 10.00am to 4.00pm, at KRC, above the Darlinghurst Fire station (entrance on Victoria Street, Darlinghurst).

For more information on testing, treatment and management of hepatitis B and C, see: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/hepatitis/Pages/default.aspx>

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