

25 July 2017

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

People living with hepatitis C can now be cured with new, easy-to-take and highly effective treatments and can make lifestyle modifications to improve their quality of life.

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.

Director of the St George Hospital Liver Clinic, Associate Professor Amany Zekry, said despite the high prevalence of the two viruses, awareness of both 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,” A/Prof Zekry 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.

In NSW, over 11,000 people were treated for hepatitis C in 2016, 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.

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

“This is a major change from hepatitis C treatment in years gone by, and now we are seeing people 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.

“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. The impact treatment and healthy lifestyle choices have had on their lives is significant.”

Hepatitis B is yet incurable, however is a totally preventable disease. 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 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,” A/Prof Zekry 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”.

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

St George Hospital’s Drug and Alcohol Service kick –start local events, with a Hepatitis Awareness Week morning tea and hepatitis quiz competition for clients and visitors on Wednesday, 26 July from 8.00am to 12.00pm at 2 South Street, Kogarah.

The Kirketon Road Centre South facility at Sutherland Hospital, will host the Hepatitis “Test and Treats” Action Day, conducting blood tests and Fibroscans to clients, provided by the St George Liver Clinic on Thursday 27 July from 11.00am to 1.30pm.

The St George Hospital Liver Clinic will take the subject of hepatitis to the public, with a Hepatitis Awareness Week information stall and chocolate wheel guessing game at the main entrance foyer of St George Hospital on Thursday, 27 July from 9.00am to 12.00pm. Staff from the Liver Clinic will be on hand to answer questions on hepatitis.

The Caringbah Community Health Centre located at Sutherland Hospital, will have on display health education and resources on hepatitis throughout the duration of Hepatitis Awareness Week from 25 - 28 July.

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