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Fighting Hepatitis: Are We Doing Enough

Jibran Umar Ayub Khan,[1] Ayesha Qaisar,[2] Azhar Zahir Shah[3]

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Hepatitis has only been a concern for the patients when it comes to their health. It has been on wavering pattern in terms of its symptoms and complication. The biggest dilemma is that it causes the incredible damage without the knowledge of the person affected. The clinical symptoms do vary from simple gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, reduced appetite, jaundice to complications like oesophageal varices and gastrointestinal bleed when hepatitis becomes chronic leading to cirrhosis.[1] In a country like ours where people don't follow the optimum practice of hygiene and getting vaccinated on time especially in rural areas, hepatitis is a heartrending spectacle where you see many people perishing within few years of diagnosis.[2] The figures are still alarming which indicates that something is wrong at some level.[3]

The debacle will continue to haunt us. Until there are sincere efforts from all the stake holders whether they are government officials, health personnel including doctors, nurses, paramedics, medical students, medical educators and even the media with a cardinal role of highlighting the problem. The problem is that we haven't understood it fully and rather complicating the things further by not following the practices of washing our hands, avoiding needle pricks, wearing glooves, safe blood transfusion ,sterilized instruments and most importantly the safe drinking water which can be the major culprit when it comes to catching acute hepatitis that can be detrimental in setting of chronic causing cute liver failure, multiple organ failure and even death if not treated in appropriate setting. [4]

Hepatitis in no more untreatable as there are a lot of modernized treatment regimes available A few years ago we were still using interferon regimes which were a hassles for these patient who were phobic to injections. But now things have changed and medicine has evolved to modernized interferon free regimes which though expensive can achieve rapid virological response in few weeks time. The evidence based medicine and research has enabled us to treat even the special populations including chronic kidney disease, HIV positive patients, decompensated cirrhotics. The inclination to treat is one thing but it does depend on the choice of the patients.

Hepatitis E does take a toll on pregnant women causing increased mortality. But things are changing first. We do have Hepatitis E vaccine now that is a ray of hope in making the life better. Hecolin was first ever vaccine introduced by leading and well known pharmaceutical industry and vaccination drive has already launched by hepatologists all over the country.[5] We do have this endeavour to curb the virus by preventive measures and vaccination is certainly the key beside others.[5]

Pakistan has the second highest global burden of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, with 5% of the population infected, i.e, 8 million people.[6] Most of the people who are infected in Pakistan do not know their hepatitis status.[7]Our aim of hepatitis free Pakistan in the next few years is possible but that needs a strong political support and the will to do things. We need to educate people at war footing. The recent emergence of disastrous floods has taken so many precious lives and simultaneously have cause surge of viral infections like dengue and hepatitis. There is a need for mass vaccination of hepatitis patients and this should be done sooner than later.[8] We already have achieved a lot in recent times. We need to keeping on doing the efforts because for eliminating of hepatitis, this is not the end. This is not even the beginning of the end. This is just the end of the beginning. If we are focused, miracles will happen and when there is a will there is a way.

1. Department of Medicine, Kabir Medical College Peshawar.
2. Department of Physiology, Khyber Medical College Peshawar.
3. Department of Surgery, Kabir Medical College Peshawar

Correspondence: Dr. Jibran Umar Ayub Khan
Department of Medicine, Kabir Medical College, Peshawar.
Email: jibranumar@yahoo.com

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