

HEPATITIS HEALTH



LOVE YOUR LIVER *Liver Awareness Month*

The month of October is recognized as National Liver Awareness Month. The goal of Liver Awareness Month is to educate people on the function of the liver and to explain health problems associated with the liver. The Florida Department of Health's (DOH) Communications Office distributed a statewide press release on October 6, 2006, which included the following statement from DOH Secretary M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D.:



Secretary
François

“The liver plays an important role in removing toxins and toxicants from what we ingest into our bodies. Citizens of Florida must take an active role in educating themselves on the preventive aspects of liver diseases since this important organ is necessary to sustain one’s life.”

The liver is the largest intestinal organ, weighs about three pounds and is the only organ that can regenerate itself. Your liver has many important functions, including the manufacture of plasma proteins, storage of carbohydrates, detoxifying drugs and toxins, fat and carbohydrate metabolism, bile formation and many more.

To learn how to keep your liver healthy by practicing a healthy diet, go to: <http://www.liverfoundation.org/db/articles/1022>. Remember: everything you eat, drink, inhale, inject and absorb through your skin is processed by your liver.

2006 Liver Awareness Month Activities – Collier County Health Department By Diana L. King, Hepatitis Program Manager

- ❖ Liver Wellness information was mailed to 210 churches and 60 CBOs in Collier County
- ❖ Our liver wellness power point presentation was updated and emailed to all of the public school health teachers in Collier County
- ❖ Liver Awareness information was emailed to all CCHD staff
- ❖ Hepatitis Vaccine/Testing offered at St. Matthews House homeless shelter
- ❖ Hepatitis Vaccine/Testing and educational presentations offered at David Lawrence Center Detox
- ❖ Hepatitis Vaccine/Testing offered at the CC Jail in Immokalee & Naples
- ❖ Hepatitis presentation at the CC JDC in Naples
- ❖ Hepatitis education offered at Edison College

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Diana King



Left to right: Bob Keane, his wife Jean and Debbie Barnes



Left to right: Anita & Gus Garcia with Dot McCarthy



TAMPA BAY AWARDS DINNER

On September 23, 2006, the Tampa Bay Hepatitis & Liver Disease Support Group, Inc. held their third annual *Award of Excellence for Service to our Community* dinner and silent auction at the Pasadena Yacht & Country Club in Gulfport, Florida. This benefit for The Chance Center honored those who have served the Tampa Bay area and helped improve the quality of life for people with liver disease. The Chance Center offers hepatitis education, support and affordable medical treatment to the uninsured working people of their community. As you can see by the photos, the theme for the evening was very “tropical.”



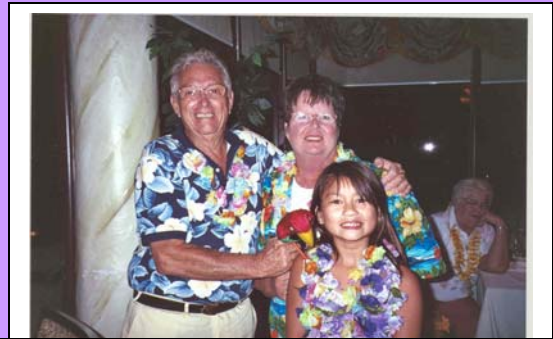
Above, left to right: Joe Santini, Karen Muller and Rick Riddick



The Three Musketeers: Cindy Runyon, Debbie Barnes and April-Nut Crowley



Mary Collins Wheeler & April Crowley



Don & Dale Vaisio with their granddaughter Julie

Highlights of the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association Meeting in Orlando By Phil Reichert

The thirtieth anniversary conference of the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association took place in Orlando August 16-18, 2006. April Crowley and I attended and wanted to relay highlights that might pertain to our work with hepatitis prevention in Florida.

The FADAA conference provided a look into a slightly different aspect of public health than what we usually experience in disease prevention. Many of the 500+ attendees were social workers, counselors, psychologists and other caregivers, case managers and facilitators. There were a preponderance of individuals who were recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. Those individuals seemed to be the most adept at being able to counsel others with similar needs.

Substance abuse has always put individuals at risk of viral hepatitis infections. Whether someone smokes tobacco or other substances, drinks alcohol or snorts, ingests or injects hallucinogenic drugs, these substances are filtered through the liver. Long-term abuse by any of those substances may cause liver damage.

Here are a few highlights of the conference.

The keynote speaker was William Cope Moyers, the son of news correspondent and former Peace Corps Director, Bill Moyers. Bill (the son), having been a journalist himself, and once working with CNN, is now vice president of Hazelden Treatment Center in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a recovering drug user (the hard stuff, including crack cocaine) and alcoholic. He has been clean for over twelve years and has just published a book, "Broken," about his life as an addict, and particularly a recovering one.

Barbara Rush, from the Center for Drug-Free Living in Orlando, and current community co-chair of the Viral Hepatitis Council, provided a presentation on infectious diseases in substance abuse centers. She gave basic transmission and prevention information about sexually transmitted infections and hepatitis A, B and C.

William White, from Chestnut Healthcare, spoke about addiction treatment. He cited these statistics: 1) Only 10% of the individuals needing addiction treatment services received them in 2002, 2) Nationally, 48% of those who are admitted for treatment do not complete it, 3) Of those individuals who do get their names onto addiction treatment lists, nearly 50% drop off before they get into treatment, and 4) Most individuals who complete addiction treatment will resume the behavior within one year of discharge.

White went on to state that a positive recovery process is enhanced by providing post-discharge care. Ongoing case management and support group participation are an important, albeit expensive, part of the recovery process.



Left to right: Bruce Campbell, Phil Reichert, April Crowley and Ken Hart pose in front of the Bureau of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Program displays at the FADAA conference.

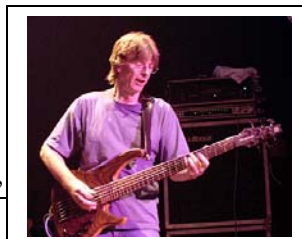
Michael Hopkins, an Orange County Sheriff's Deputy, and Deborah Orr, with Orlando's Center for Drug-Free Living, talked about the effect methamphetamines have had on populations at risk of communicable diseases. They showed how easy it is to obtain, then follow the "recipe" for creating crystal meth. Before and after pictures of individuals who have used crystal meth demonstrated the physical devastation that crystal meth can do in a very short time. Crystal meth is highly addictive and will cause behavior changes that put users at risk of hepatitis, HIV and other STDs.

Grateful Dead Guitarist Phil Lesh: Prostate Cancer and Hep C Organ Donor Program

<http://www.thecancerblog.com/2006/10/29/grateful-dead-phil-lesh-prostate-cancer-hep-c-organ-donor-program>

Musician and founding member of Grateful Dead Phil Lesh has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and will be undergoing the da Vinci robotic surgical procedure in December to remove the tumor. As a result of his prostate cancer diagnosis, he is urging all men to have a periodic PSA screening for early detection of prostate cancer.

In 1998, Lesh underwent a liver transplant as a result of chronic hepatitis C infection. He has become an active advocate for organ donor programs and raising awareness for hepatitis C. Lesh is expecting a full recovery from prostate cancer because it was caught in its early stage. For more information, visit the Phil Lesh and Friends website at <http://www.phillesh.net/>.



Phil Lesh

The American Liver Foundation Applauds Steven Tyler

On September 30, 2006, The American Liver Foundation (ALF) thanked Steven Tyler, lead singer of Aerosmith, for his recent announcement that he has been battling hepatitis C.

"Mr. Tyler has done something very commendable," said Fred Thompson, president and CEO of ALF. "By speaking out about his personal struggle with hepatitis C, he helps draw attention to a terrible disease that affects almost 4 million Americans. We need more brave people to speak out about this disease that is far too often ignored."

Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne infection in the United States. "There are 36,000 new cases of hepatitis C in the U.S. each year," said Thompson. "But many of those infected have no idea they are sick because the disease doesn't have any specific symptoms. If Mr. Tyler's action can motivate more people to get the simple blood test necessary to screen for the disease, he will have improved the lives of thousands."



Steven Tyler with his daughter, Liv Tyler.

Christopher Lawford



Lawford channels grief into acting, activism By Laura Raposa, *Boston Herald*

Christopher Lawford has dived into acting, writing and speaking engagements to deal with the recent death of his 82-year-old mom, **Patricia Kennedy Lawford**. "My sisters and I are in a transitional period, I guess you could say" said Lawford, who was in Boston recently to advocate for hepatitis C testing at a medical conference. "It's an odd feeling losing a parent."

Lawford is using his grief to help combat unnecessary death from hepatitis C, a disease he contracted from intravenous drug use in the early '90s. He survived the disease because he was tested for it early before his liver began to shut down.

"There's a whole generation of people out there who engaged in some rather adventuresome behavior 20 years ago," said the recovering drug user. "I bet they have no idea that years later it could catch up with them." Lawford said he could have caught hepatitis C from sharing a needle with "Papa" **John Phillips** of the **Mamas and the Papas**, who died of the disease in 2001.

Walking Livers

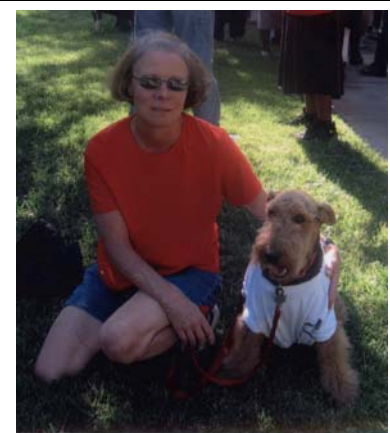
The American Liver Foundation (ALF) held its First Annual "Walk the River for Your Liver" on September 30, 2006, in Tampa, Florida. The purpose of the walk was to promote a healthy and active liver-conscious lifestyle while raising money and awareness to help support liver research and patient support programs.



AIDS WALK

"AIDS doesn't care who you are. We do." That was the message on a huge banner that led the way for walkers to follow during the 16th Annual Big Bend Cares AIDS Walk on Sunday, October 8, 2006, in Tallahassee.

There were 678 walkers, and the event raised more than \$33,260. Staff from the Bureau of HIV/AIDS who participated included: Becky Grigg (and her dog Jackson), Stefanie White (and her boyfriend Hiram Gibbard), Pat Simmons (and her dog Pete) and Debbie Norberto.



Becky and Jackson Grigg.

Highlights of a CDC MMWR Article Entitled: HEPATITIS B VACCINATION COVERAGE AMONG ADULTS-US, 2004

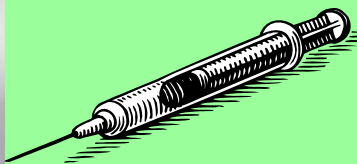
By Phil Reichert

In an MMWR article published in late 2006, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends a comprehensive strategy to eliminate hepatitis B transmission in the United States. From 1990 through 2004, the incidence of acute hepatitis B declined from 8.5 per 100,000 population to 2.1 per 100,000 population, a 75% reduction in reported cases. According to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS, 2004), vaccine coverage among adults at high risk increased from 30% in 2000 to 45% in 2004. Some of these numbers are reflected in the aging of persons vaccinated as adolescents.

In spite of great efforts made over the last fourteen years to vaccinate infants and children, hepatitis B vaccine coverage among adults at risk is still relatively low. National programs that support hepatitis B vaccine for children are not readily available for adults. Florida is fortunate to have legislative funding to support its Hepatitis 09 Program, which provides hepatitis A and B vaccine for adults through the 67 county health departments. Most states do not have funding for adult vaccine programs.

Demonstration projects have shown that providing comprehensive HIV, STD and hepatitis services through STD and other public health clinics increases vaccine coverage to individuals at risk of hepatitis B. In addition to integrating hepatitis testing and vaccine services into clinics at county health departments, ACIP recommends the removal of barriers to risk-assessing and vaccinating high risk individuals in correctional and substance abuse treatment facilities.

Hepatitis B vaccine has been proven safe and effective. According to ACIP recommendations we should increase hepatitis B vaccine coverage in public health and primary care programs by, 1) Informing adults that receive preventive clinical services of the benefit of the hepatitis B vaccine, 2) vaccinating all adults who seek protection from hepatitis B (including individuals who report as men who have sex with men and former and current injecting drug users) and 3) adopting strategies to ensure all adults at risk are offered hepatitis B vaccine.



2005 NIS DATA INDICATE SLIGHT INCREASE IN HEPATITIS B VACCINATION RATE OF NEWBORNS COMPARED WITH 2004 DATA

On September 28, the National Immunization Program (NIP) website posted an Excel spreadsheet titled "Estimated Vaccination Coverage for Hepatitis B Vaccine Among Children from Birth to 2 Days of Age by State and Immunization Action Plan Area—National Immunization Survey, 2005." The data indicate the national average for a birth dose given within two days of life has risen slightly from a 2004 rate of 46.0 percent to a 2005 rate of 47.9 percent. To access the spreadsheet, go to: http://www.cdc.gov/nip/coverage/NIS/05/tab36_hepb_birth02.xls

CDC's Response to Frequently Asked Questions About Hepatitis C
 Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c/faq.htm#1a>

Should pregnant women be routinely tested for anti-HCV? No. Pregnant women have no greater risk of being infected with HCV than non-pregnant women. If pregnant women have risk factors for hepatitis C, they should be tested for anti-HCV.

What is the risk that HCV infected women will spread HCV to their newborn infants?

About 4 out of every 100 infants born to HCV infected women become infected. This occurs at the time of birth, and there is no treatment that can prevent this from happening. Most infants infected with HCV at the time of birth have no symptoms and do well during childhood. More studies are needed to find out if these children will have problems from the infection as they grow older.

Is there a greater risk of perinatal HCV transmission if the mother is coinfecting with HIV?

Yes, if the mother is coinfecting with HIV, the rate of perinatal transmission can be as high as 19%.

Should a woman with hepatitis C be advised against breast-feeding?

No. There is no evidence that breast-feeding spreads HCV. HCV-positive mothers should consider abstaining from breast-feeding if their nipples are cracked or bleeding.

When should babies born to mothers with hepatitis C be tested to see if they were infected at birth?

Children should not be tested for anti-HCV before 18 months of age as anti-HCV from the mother might last until this age. If diagnosis is desired prior to 18 months of age, testing for HCV RNA could be performed at or after an infant's first well-child visit at age 1-2 months. HCV RNA testing should then be repeated at a subsequent visit independent of the initial HCV RNA test result.

OCTOBER 2006 ISSUE OF NEEDLE TIPS OFFERS MANY RESOURCES FOR CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENT AND ADULT IMMUNIZATION

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) recently mailed the latest issue of *Needle Tips* (October 2006) to 160,000 health professionals and others who work in the field of immunization. Packed with immunization resources for health professionals, patients, and parents, the 24-page issue is well worth downloading. All articles and education pieces, except editorials, have been thoroughly reviewed by immunization and hepatitis experts at CDC.

To view the table of contents with links to individual articles, go to: <http://www.immunize.org/nt>

Every Parent's Nightmare By Cherry Douglas

My son, Rob, was only 23 when his life ended on October 10, 2001, due to complications from hepatitis C (HCV).

That day was far from the beginning or the end of my battle with this dreaded enemy. You see, I too had hepatitis C. I was diagnosed in 1996. Did I unknowingly pass this disease on to my only son? I'll never know for sure, but odds are he probably did contract it from me. I had blood transfusions prior to his birth in 1977, and could have already been infected by the time he was born. I also had transfusions after the birth of both of my children.

Rob found out that he had hepatitis C following September 11th when he and his sister, Mandy, went and stood in the rain for eight hours to give blood. Like so many others, the two of them felt like they needed to do something to help.

On October 5, 2001, Rob received a letter in the mail from the blood bank thanking him for the effort, and informing him that they could not use his blood because it was contaminated with Hepatitis C. None of us knew that he too would be a tragedy associated with 9-11.

Rob went to the doctor the day before his death, October 9, 2001, to get the results of a second test that confirmed that he did indeed have HCV. At the time, he was sick with a fever and cough. He was given a cocktail of medications that mixed in a deadly way with his current prescribed meds.

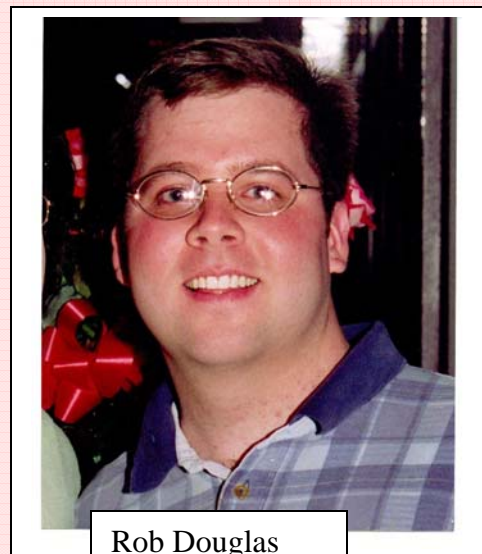
Unbeknownst to us at the time, Rob also had myocarditis (inflammation of the muscle tissue of the heart). This was discovered in the autopsy. Combined with that, the HCV and all the various drugs in his system, he did not stand a chance.

If Rob had known earlier about his hepatitis C, his death probably could have been prevented. It's important to know your hepatitis C status so you can keep your liver as healthy as possible. Certain medications (even over-the-counter) can be harmful to the liver when you have HCV.

There is treatment for hepatitis C that has been known to cure it in 50 percent of the cases. I myself have been on treatment twice, but I'll save that adventurous story for another time. My son never got the chance to find out if he was even a candidate for treatment. When Rob did find out he was positive for hepatitis C, he insisted that his wife, father and sister get tested. All three of them are negative.

Even though the pain of Rob's death still stings, my faith in God has made me realize that all of this has happened for a greater purpose. My goal now is to educate others about this disease. If I can prevent just one parent from experiencing my nightmare, then Rob's death will not be in vain. Don't let hepatitis C attack your liver. **Get tested...for Rob's sake.**

Editor's Note: Cherry Douglas is the founder of Hepatitis Ready Care, a non-profit organization in Tallahassee. Contact her at cherrydouglas@comcast.net



Rob Douglas

Over 2500 Attend the U.S. Conference on AIDS in Hollywood, Florida

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS NATIONAL MEETING

By Phil Reichert

Over 2500 individuals from the United States and other parts of the globe attended the 10th anniversary 2006 U.S. Conference on AIDS in Hollywood from September 21-25. Last year's conference was cancelled at the last minute due to the impact of Hurricane Rita on the Houston area, as well as the city's acceptance of Katrina refugees from the New Orleans area.

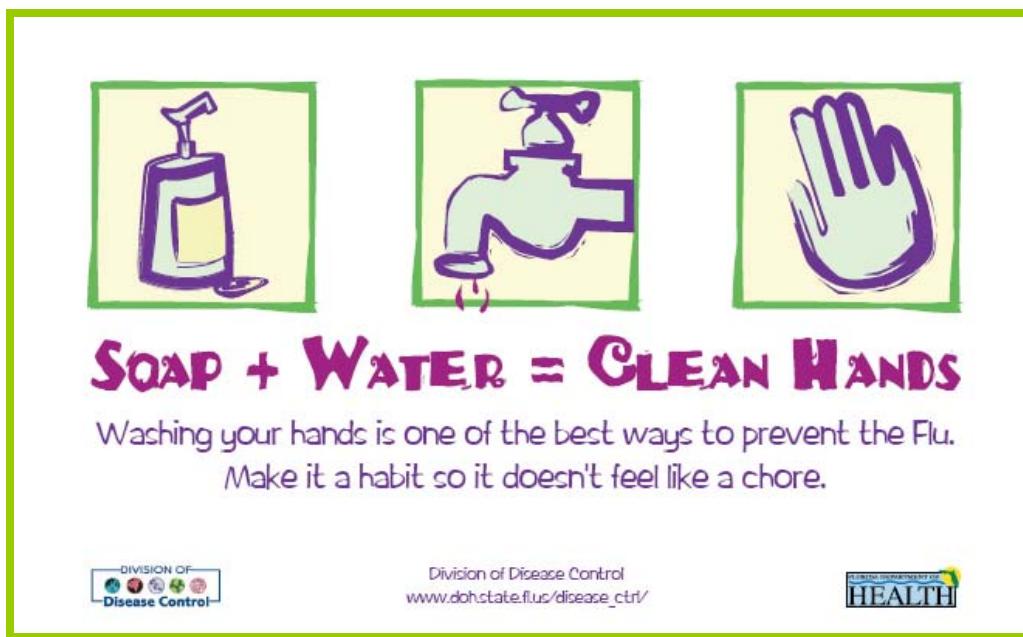
The theme of the 2006 conference was "Rejuvenate, Revitalize and Remember," and one of the breakout sessions included a timeline showing milestones in the 25 years of AIDS on paper that filled three walls of one of the conference rooms. At one point in the discussion of how the AIDS epidemic has affected everyone in the past twenty-five years, the presenter asked everyone to stand up and walk to the part of the wall that represented the year we became involved in the epidemic. Interestingly, there were five of us that stood under the year, "1981" (the first year that CDC announced this "new" epidemic). Most people in the room were young and had only been involved in AIDS work for five to ten years. Touching stories were told about how we first got into this line of work. Several individuals did it because they lost friends or relatives to the disease.

Doctors Luc Montanier and Robert Gallo, the co-discoverers of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and scientists who have worked with the disease for 25 years, spoke together on stage for the first time ever at the conference. Earvin "Magic" Johnson, former professional basketball star and a person living with HIV/AIDS, was honored for his hard work fighting this disease and spoke at the kick-off reception. Sheryl Lee Ralph, actress and AIDS activist, put on her one-woman show, "Sometimes I Cry: The Loves, Lives and Losses of Women Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS."

Daniel Raymond, with the Harm Reduction Program in New York, spoke about HIV and hepatitis C co-infection. In discordant couples (where one partner is infected with HCV and one is not), there is not significant transmission of HCV unless blood is exchanged during sex. About 25% to 30% of individuals with HIV infection in the United States are also HCV infected. About 90% of injecting drug users (IDU) with HIV are also infected with HCV. Finally, there are approximately 250,000 to 300,000 people in the U.S. who are living with both HIV/AIDS and HCV.

There was a presentation that looked at the feasibility of providing safe access to needle-exchange programs by IDUs, and another entitled, "Gay and Gray: The Aging of HIV." Jolene Mullins and Paul Spearing of the Broward County Health Department spoke about the work they have done in that county through the Senior HIV Intervention Program (SHIP). As individuals infected with HIV (and HCV) are living into their fifties and sixties, new problems arise regarding prevention intervention programs to reach that audience.

Older men who have sex with men (MSM) are engaging in anonymous sex with multiple partners they meet on the Internet or in parks, where younger MSM hang out and have sex. Older MSM may not identify themselves as "gay." Viagra (and other sex enhancing drugs) and crystal meth taken together before having sex is called a "happy meal." Focus group studies show that older gay men are "making up for lost time" for having "played the game" and not been promiscuous when they were younger. Older men often have trouble "coming out" as being gay. Older gay men are perceived as having money and are attractive to younger gay men. The good news is, according to their research Mullins and Spearing said older gay men are willing to attend public health education sessions. They do this under the pretext they are gathering information for children and grandchildren.



Dear April,

Thank you so much for sending me the press release for Liver Awareness Month. I am very glad that the Florida Department of Health is using their time and resources to include needed information regarding transmission of hep C. Most people (including primary care physicians) are unfamiliar with treatment, diagnosis, prognosis and genotypes.

A gentleman from my support group lost his job working in produce for a large chain grocery store when he was required to answer a questionnaire about whether or not he has hepatitis C, or hepatitis B. This man answered honestly that he does have hepatitis C, and his hours were cut so badly that he had to find other employment after working for the same company for many years. As you know, hep C CAN NOT be transmitted from chopping vegetables. It must be blood to blood. Managers in the food industry need to be more concerned about employees not washing their hands and spreading all types of other diseases instead of worrying about them transmitting hep C.

In my personal life, I come in contact with many people who shun me (I am hep C positive) much like in the 1980's with HIV. Accurate information would indeed promote and protect the safety of all people in Florida, and I'm glad to see the department's efforts to bridge this gap of misinformation.

I will pass along this information to people who may be in a position to reach others who are infected with hep C.

Sybil Streit, Alachua County

Note: We usually don't print "letters to the editor" per say, but after talking with Sybil, we felt this particular message needed to be shared. It's another example of the stigma related to hepatitis C and how important it is to educate the public about this disease.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Hepatitis Health is brought to you by the Hepatitis Prevention Program in the Division of Disease Control, Bureau of HIV/AIDS at the Florida Department of Health. We want to know what you are doing in your community to prevent viral hepatitis. Please submit your articles and photos to: April.Crowley@doh.state.fl.us

If I were given the opportunity to present a gift to the next generation it would be the ability of each individual to learn to laugh at himself.

--Charles Schultz