



## 5. Hepatitis C ➤ Support and understanding

- 5.1 Your family and friends
- 5.2 Peer and group support
- 5.3 Who should I tell?
- 5.4 Confidentiality
- 5.5 Discrimination

### 5.1 Your family and friends

Most people manage hepatitis C treatment well, but for some it can be stressful. Preparing the important things with those around you, can make being on treatment easier.

The treatment may have some side effects, so ask your doctor what side effects you may experience and how to deal with them. You may want to discuss this with your family and friends if you think you will need their support. They can also help you remember to take the medication and assist with household tasks.

For appointments with your doctor, try to take someone you trust with you. They can support you at the appointment, remind you about questions you want to ask and help you remember what the doctor said.

### 5.2 Peer and group support

Support groups and networks can provide valuable support during treatment, especially if you are having difficulties dealing with the side effects. Many Hepatitis organisations have support groups for people on hepatitis C treatment or people with hepatitis C.

### 5.3 Who should I tell?

This is a common question that is difficult to answer because everyone is different, with different relationships, different friends and different needs. When you first find out you have hepatitis C it is your choice who you want to know about it. It may be helpful to think about what you want to say and who you want to tell. Also, think about whether you trust them and whether telling them will help you in some way.

Telling health care workers, such as your dentist or other doctors, can help them give you the best medical care, but it is your choice. Health workers involved in your care have a responsibility to protect your privacy and keep your information confidential. They cannot discriminate against you in any way.

You don't have to tell your boss or anyone you work with that you have hepatitis C unless you want to. A caring and understanding employer can make things easier for you by giving you time off if you aren't feeling well. You are in the best position to decide who to tell and how they may react.

Talking to people about having hepatitis C can be very important to your health. Talking to people who understand will help you cope with hepatitis C, and any stress it can sometimes create.

There are some situations where you are required by law to report your hepatitis C status. These include:

- If you are donating blood at the Blood Bank
- If information about infections and illness is requested by some insurance companies
- If you are a member of the Australian Defence Force.

#### **5.4 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality means that any information a health service has about you is private, and they cannot give that information to other people without your permission. In Australia, it is against the law for any health care professional to discuss your private information with others. This applies not only to doctors and nurses but also to social workers, counsellors, interpreters and reception staff. None of these people can tell your husband, wife, partner, parents or children about your health without your permission.

Sometimes it may feel like too many people know your private business. For example, in a clinic you may see a number of doctors, nurses and other staff. This is because in hospitals and clinics staff usually work as a team. Any information or discussion they have about your health is so they can provide you with the best possible care.

In addition, any information that you give to your boss about your health is private and confidential and they cannot pass this information to another person or organisation without your permission.

#### **5.5 Discrimination**

Discrimination means to act unfairly against a person or a group of people because of their gender, sexuality, race, colour, health problems or religious beliefs. In Australia, it is against the law for any health care professional to discriminate against you, or refuse you service for any of the following reasons:

- You have hepatitis C.
- You do not speak English or speak English with an accent.
- You are not an Australian citizen.
- You are an injecting drug user.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against or treated unfairly for these or any other reason you can make a complaint. See the Finding services section on our website for relevant phone numbers in each State and Territory.