No Cure, But A Better Liver

Hep C treatment left her healthier, though not Hep-less

October 1, 2005 By Laura Whitehorn

Sandra Benns
46
Baltimore
College Student
Diagnosed since 1998

Baltimore HIVer Sandra Benns was “almost driven crazy” by hepatitis C treatment, which didn’t trounce hep. Was Benns discouraged? Never!

The Challenge: “I was diagnosed with hep C soon after HIV. In three years, meds had my HIV undetectable, so I could stop them when I got lipo. When a 2003 liver biopsy showed moderate fibrosis, I decided to treat my hep C, too.”

The Stuff: “I took Pegasys and Ribavirin—the standard treatment. A friend told me that the Pegasys shots can cause depression and had made her want to kill herself. I soon understood—I’d sit looking at my house, which was a wreck, but I couldn’t get myself up to clean it.”

The Tips: “I took the shots on Friday nights to get the worst side effects over during the weekend. My family’s support helped a lot, too.”

The Wall: “In six months, my hep C viral load fell from 800,000 to 3,000, but my doctor said that if the meds don’t make you undetectable by then, it’s not going to clear C. So we stopped the treatment.”

The Outcome: “I ended up healthier. My liver enzymes are near normal, and my CD4 count is higher, too.”

The Takeaway: “HIV doesn’t scare me. If I need to start meds again, I know there are choices. But not for hepatitis, so I feel that’s the bigger problem.”

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