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MCHD TO HOLD HEPATITIS CLINIC FOR PATIENTS WITH HEPATITIS C & HEPATITIS B

MORGANTOWN, WV – (NOVEMBER 29, 2017)

The number of cases of Hepatitis C is on the rise, one of the legacies of the opioid crisis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), the number of cases has risen in West Virginia from 46 in 2011 to 63 in 2015, making the state the second highest per capita in the nation for cases of Hepatitis C. For the United States overall, the number is even more dramatic, almost doubling from 1,232 in 2011 to 2,436 in 2015.

To help people who have Hepatitis C and/or Hepatitis B, the Monongalia County Health Department will hold a Hepatitis Clinic from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Fridays. The clinic will be led by Susan R. McKenrick, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC and Kendra L. Barker, DNP, CDE, ADM. Barker also leads MCHD’s Diabetes Clinic that is held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fridays.

People who are interested in attending the Hepatitis Clinic do not need a referral from a doctor, but they do need to make an appointment. Anyone who wants an initial diagnosing screening test can get one for free at MCHD. Additional testing does have a cost and can be covered with insurance or on a sliding scale basis for those without insurance.

“Treatment will be available through the health department for patients with little or no liver damage,” McKenrick said. “More complicated cases will be referred to specialists for care and treatment.”

HCV screening with an HCV Ab test indicates whether a patient has ever been exposed to Hepatitis C. The next step is an HCV RNA test, which will reveal if the HCV infection is currently active. Combinations of these tests and results will provide clues to whether the patient has a recent, or acute, exposure and infection, or if it is chronic.
For those patients, additional blood work would be ordered to check liver function, and an ultrasound would be performed to check for liver damage. Because Hepatitis C can affect other functions, the patient would be checked for a vitamin D deficiency and for thyroid problems. Patients who test negative for Hepatitis B can receive a vaccine.

Patients who test positive for Hepatitis B only can be treated at the clinic; however, patients who are positive for both Hepatitis B and C should be referred to specialists, because they are at an increased risk for liver complications and reactivation of Hepatitis B.

Both Hepatitis B and C can be acute, short-term illnesses, or they can turn into chronic diseases that cause cirrhosis of the liver.

Hepatitis B and C can be contracted several ways. At this time, the most common form of transmission for Hepatitis C in young adults is injection drug use, particularly with shared needles. The most common form of Hepatitis B transmission is sexual contact. Both can be transmitted from mother to infant during birth.

Other modes of transmission include receiving an infected transplant organ, infected blood products prior to 1987 or a blood transfusion prior to 1992, non-professional tattoos, long-term dialysis and occupational exposure by health care workers.

Those born between 1945 and 1965 should be screened as three out of four people with chronic Hepatitis C are in this age group.

Treating Hepatitis C is very expensive, ranging from $56,000 to $294,00 for a course of treatment depending on the type of virus and length of treatment. McKenrick and Barker can help patients navigate the insurance and/or pharmaceutical companies to get treatment for patients.

For more information on MCHD’s Hepatitis Clinic, or to make an appointment, call 304-598-5119.

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