

I tested positive.

I had recently visited a friend in hospital who has since died from liver cancer after having hep C for many years. He told me that there were great hep C meds available these days and there was no need to suffer in silence. So when Rodd offered to support me in getting treatment, I knew I just had to do it.

I also knew that Rodd had been where I was now, and if he said it was simple and worthwhile, then I believed him.

Rodd was amazing. Even though we were friends before the Buddy Program, he had no problem being professional, totally confidential and objective. He went above and beyond for me.

Rodd got me a great doctor —Dr Phil at Kirketon Road Clinic (KRC) — and came to every appointment so I was not shouldering it all myself. We would talk before an appointment and Rodd would make a note of all the things I wanted dealt with. If I forgot something, he'd ask the questions I needed answered.

When we first saw Dr Phil, I “interviewed” him to see if he was a good match for me. I found him knowledgeable and caring. I have since seen other doctors and nurses at KRC and they've all been great. All in all, NUAA and KRC hands down beat the service I had been going to previously, especially in terms of respect and understanding.

Dr Phil decided I needed to get my HIV stable again before I could start hep C treatment. That meant going back on HIV meds.

Because I had got hep C only recently, the doctor told me that my liver damage was minimal and I had plenty of time to get treated. That was time I could use to get my other health problems sorted out, to give hep C treatment the best chance of working.

Once my HIV was stable again, I was able to deal with hep C. I only had to take a tablet a day and I had no side effects. The treatment was successful.

For the first time in a long time, I feel like my health is on track.

Because I was part of the Buddy program, NUAA paid for the hep C meds and paid me whenever I attended an appointment or had a test. That helped. I had a lot of stressful money worries at the time and it was great to have another level of tension removed.

It was amazing having a Buddy to go through the process with. Rodd is a good sounding board and really helped me with my stress.

Part way into the treatment I split up with my partner of 15 years. Rodd helped me deal with it and stay on track with my meds and tests even though I was feeling lost and sad. He rang me regularly just to see how I was coping with the pills, whether I had any side effects, whether I was taking them properly... all that sort of thing.

I'd recommend the Buddy system to anyone. It really helped to share the burden with someone who understands and is respectful. I had a lot on my plate emotionally through it all so it was such a relief to have that support.

From that first test, the Buddy program has changed my life for the better.

WILL THE MEDS MAKE ME FEEL CRAP?

THEN...



THE OLD MEDS CAUSED
LIFE-STOPPING
SIDE EFFECTS.

...NOW!



BAD REACTIONS
TO THE NEW MEDS
ARE RARE.

MOST PEOPLE
HAVE AN EASY TIME.

**IT'S A BIG CHANGE
FOR THE BETTER!**



WANT TO KNOW MORE? CALL NUAA ON 02 8354 7300 OR TOLL-FREE 1800 644 413.

Rodd

Being a NUAA Hep C Buddy is about bringing together a health professional role with peer experience. As a service, we help people feel comfortable and in control of their care. It's about flexibility — what do they want and how do they want to use me as a Buddy? I try to be affirming, reassuring and friendly.

I understand the stigma that comes with being a drug user. Here at NUAA, we treat people as people first.

I've been through hep C treatment myself, so I can reassure people they are making the right decision by getting tested and treated. I understand the fear of finding out you have hep C then entering the commitment of treatment. I tell people the only side effect I had from the meds was that I didn't have firm poo — that's a great ice-breaker! I try to be comforting but also reassuring. I am very aware that this is someone's life.

I feel very confident in our partners, KRC. They really support me in my job. They really know their stuff, are respectful of our members and are great to work with. We have a KRC nurse at the NUAA NSP at 345 Crown St, Surry Hills every Thursday 2pm to 4pm (clinic hours will be increasing in October!). You can be tested for HIV, hep B, hep C and sexually transmitted infections without an appointment or a Medicare card or ID. Then we can take you to the doctors at the KRC head office above the Fire Station in Kings Cross (entrance in Victoria St) to get you started on treatment.

I've known Logan a long time. When I came into the job as a NUAA buddy, I began encouraging everyone I knew who injected drugs to come in to get tested. It's estimated that thousands of people in Australia don't know they have hep C. I feel strongly that as people who use drugs, we should look after our health. We are most at risk of viral hepatitis — hep B and C — and should get tested regularly. I just had to do it.

If, like Logan, we find out we are living with hep C very soon after being exposed to it, we can clear the virus before it has time to damage our livers. If we have been living with it for a long time without realising, it is important we find out to get treated immediately. I really encourage everyone to get tested.

Logan came in to the NUAA NSP to get tested on my recommendation because he was unhappy with the care he'd been getting for his HIV. He needed to see where his viral load was at. He also wanted to support me in my new job, so he agreed to be tested for hep C.

He was ready to make some changes in his life and he just needed some direction. I never dreamed we would have him back on HIV meds too. It just goes to show what a difference having a good team of people behind you can make.

I am especially proud of Logan that despite his long-term relationship breaking down mid-treatment, he stuck to it and is looking and feeling so much better. I really think that focusing on his physical health supported his mental health during a difficult time. Instead of falling apart, he pulled himself together and came out of it healthier and stronger. It was very special being a part of this important part of his life.

RODD: I feel strongly that as people who use drugs, we should look after our health.

LOGAN: For the first time in a long time, I feel like my health is on track.

INTERESTED IN HEP C TREATMENT?

NUAA's **new BUDDY PROGRAM** can help **YOU!**



STIGMA-FREE PRACTICAL HELP AND SUPPORT

- information • advice • referrals
- appointment reminders • understanding 'one on one'

Find out how the **BUDDY PROGRAM** can help you, visit NUAA's NSP 385 Crown St (corner Albion St) Surry Hills, 8am to 8pm Mon-Fri or the **LIVER CLINIC** on Thursdays 2pm to 4pm. Ph (02) 8354 7343.

Or call the NUAA office on (02) 8354 7300 or 1800 644 413.



NUAA is your organisation. We are independent and community based. We aim to advance the health, rights and dignity of people who inject drugs. nuaa.org.au

Daniel's Story

Clearing Hep C

Daniel cleared hep C through NUAA's Buddy Program

UN: So Daniel, you lived with hep C for nearly 20 years. When did you first become aware that you had it?

Daniel: When I was tested at my sexual health clinic back in 2000 and it came back positive for hep C.

UN: How did you feel when it came back positive?

Daniel: I actually didn't know anything about hep C at that time. I remember feeling relieved that it wasn't HIV. Which, looking back, is crazy, because more people that use intravenous drugs die from hep C-related illness than from HIV-related stuff. But at that time, I knew nothing about all that.

UN: Did the test results cause you to make any changes in your life?

Daniel: No, not really. I did make sure never to let anyone use my equipment after I had used it. At first just my fit. I was super paranoid about that because I know I contracted the virus through a used fit. But as years went by and I learnt more about hep C, I stopped people using my other equipment. You know, spoons, water, tourniquets and so on.

UN: You seem pretty certain you contracted hep C through a fit and not through other equipment. Why's that?

Daniel: There was only one time that I shared. A neighbour dropped around to see if I could get on for her because her dealer was off. I was hanging out badly and when she got the gear she made up a shot for me. She only had the one fit and of course she went first. I knew at the time what a stupid thing it was to do, but it didn't stop me. I was so sick.

UN: You were diagnosed with hep C in 2000. Did you receive or seek treatment at that time?

Daniel: No.

UN: Why not?

Daniel: They only had the old-style interferon treatment at that point. It made people really sick. I'd heard of people vomiting, their hair falling out, aging 10 years in one year. Living with hep C, I had no symptoms. The treatment sounded much worse than the illness.

UN: It's now 2018. Are you still living with hepatitis C?



Just one tablet, once a day. No sickness at all.

Daniel: (With big smile) No, thank goodness. There is a great new treatment that I found out about when I dropped into the NUAA NSP for supplies. I started chatting with one of the workers there and they told me about the “Buddy Program”. You get \$10 on the spot for having the blood test. So, I had the test and the nurse, who was from KRC (Kirkteon Road Clinic), suggested that I come down to get my results and to have a fibroscan if I was still positive.

UN: So, you obviously followed that up. What happened at KRC?

Daniel: First, I had another blood test to see what genotype I had, followed by a fibroscan. I also got given a \$30 gift voucher. Whenever I would have my blood taken, they would give me a voucher. It really helped, and it also encouraged me to go to my appointments. Then they gave me a box of tablets with a month’s worth of medication. Sometimes, they will give you a week’s worth and some people can go in daily and get them, if they don’t have somewhere safe to keep them. For me it was a month at a time. I had to take them for 3 months so I only had to go in 3 times.

UN: How much did the tablets cost you?

Daniel: For me, going through KRC, they were free. If you go to a GP and you have a health care card or pension card, it costs \$6.60 a month for 2 or 3 months, however long your doctor says you need to take them for.

UN: And how did you go on the treatment? Did

it make you sick? Did you have to quit using for it to work?

Daniel: No! I didn’t get sick at all! I got a few minor headaches the first few days but that was all. The rest of the time I was fine. It was so easy. Just one tablet, once a day. No sickness at all! And they treated me even though they knew I was using. I even took part in a study to show that treatment can be successful even while you use drugs. There are doctors out there who are refusing treatment to people because they are using. That is just so wrong. This study aims to prove that. And I definitely didn’t quit. I used both heroin and ice throughout my treatment.

UN: And what was the outcome?

Daniel: I cleared hep C!

UN: Congratulations! Is there anything else you would like to say?

Daniel: I would suggest that people try out the Buddy Program at NUAA’s NSP on Crown St. It worked for me. They’ll help people out if they need it, with medicine costs, transport, moral support and help keeping appointments. I also want people to know that if they already cleared the virus once and then have a stupid moment like mine — when they are sick or desperate — it’s okay. I’m not recommending being careless, but the treatment is available as many times as they need.

Tim's Story

Getting Hep C Treatment in Jail

Tim is a tattoo artist who has cleared hep C while in jail.

I've done lots of hep C education courses in jail, so I know a fair bit about hep C, but there always seems to be more to learn. I think telling people about hep C is important. It's great how treatment is getting easier and better.

I found out I had hep C in the mid-1990s. I went into jail in Victoria, where blood testing is mandatory. They look for sexually transmitted infections and blood borne viruses like hep B, hep C and HIV, and I came up positive for hep C. I worked out I'd got it from sharing equipment with an ex-girlfriend.

I didn't do anything about it then. Apart from the fact that I didn't have any symptoms, the only treatment at the time was interferon and I knew that not only did it make you sick, it didn't work for most people. I knew a guy whose skin fell off. It just didn't seem worth it.

I had heard whispers about the new treatments so when the nurses here offered it to me I went for it. I didn't hesitate at all, I just said "sweet" and got onto the Harvoni. It's been good. No side effects at all. I've just had my last blood test and am waiting for the results but the way I feel says I've cleared it.

It didn't feel like the hep C had been holding me back, but now I've finished the treatment I feel 18 again. I have so much more energy. I can work all day solid in the gardens and feel great afterwards. Before I was doing the work OK, but felt sluggish after. Now I feel fantastic at the end of the day.

There's a few in treatment here. It's a pretty supportive place, people actually talk about hep C here, and if you're on treatment they're likely to say "yeah, good on you mate". It's not like that in most jails. People think about their health here and the nurses are the best anywhere.

Outside, I'm a tattoo artist. When I was a kid I enjoyed drawing birds and animals. Then I saw my first tattoo and loved it. I practiced on myself and on guys in jail and had a job in a tattoo parlour out west. There's no tattooing in this jail, but I draw a lot of designs for the guys in here so they can get them done outside. I really like the process of working with someone to get a design they really love.

I remember when I was working as a tattoo artist, a girl came in and was really scared, but I talked her through it and made sure she was happy with the design.



Now I've finished the treatment I feel 18 again.

She came back to show me how much she loved it and brought her girlfriend and they both got tattoos on that return visit. That's what I love, what I find really satisfying. Working with people to get a tattoo they will really love and connect with.

I'll work as a tattoo artist again when I get out and get somewhere to live. I got the sack last time because I was using too much, but I'm not using now so I think it will work out this time. I'm glad I've cleared hep C. No-one wants to be tattooed by someone who has hep C. If you're tattooing, you need to know about blood borne viruses like hep C. People think you just need to change the needle but you have to change the barrel as well. You have to use all sterile equipment and work really cleanly.

In jail, you need to use Fincol [Fincol is jail bleach: Ed] if you want to be safe and healthy and avoid hep C. Fincol is not always easy to get in jail. And often when you use, it's not planned, it's spur of the moment and happens in the yard. I knew one guy who carried around a urine sample jar full of Fincol just in case. But of course, if you're caught with it you get charged for it. I think there should be a dispenser in every yard.

As far as me and drugs are concerned, I've decided I'm over chasing it in jail. I've been doing it for long enough. I don't use inside any more. If I do use outside at any time in the future, I'll make sure I do it properly with sterile equipment. I am never getting hep C again.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO TAKE THE MEDS?

BEFORE...

12 HARD
MONTHS
AKA
1 YEAR...



TODAY!

USUALLY 2
OR 3
MONTHS.



**IT'S COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT TODAY!**

WANT TO KNOW MORE? CALL NUAA ON 02 8354 7300 OR TOLL-FREE 1800 644 413.

USER'S STORIES

Ben's Story

A Good Use of Time

Ben had his hep C cured in jail and highly recommends the new treatments

I started using very young. Everything fell away. I wasn't going to school, just using.

After a while, I decided that wasn't how I wanted my life to go. I decided to join the army so I went back to school to do my School Certificate so I could qualify. At 17, I applied. I was given all sorts of tests as part of the army recruiting process, including blood tests. That's when I found out I had hep C. I had never shared a fit, but I did share spoons and tourniquets and I'm guessing that's how I got it.

To get into the army, I was required to do the treatment and reapply when I was cleared. The only treatment at the time was the old interferon treatment. I had heard plenty of negative things about that, including that it lasted a year and often didn't work. It just seemed too hard for no guaranteed result.

When I came into jail and knew the new treatments were up and running, I hassled and hassled to get on them. I started the meds in Cessnock and finished them at Parklea.

I had to take two tablets every day for 12 weeks. I had a dull headache for the first few days and a little bit of sleeplessness, but no other side effects. I am now hep C-free and I highly recommend the treatment.

I've put on a bit of weight since I cleared the hep C! I'm healthier for it, but I'm now hitting the gym to firm up and get fitter.

I recently went to an information session on hep C held by Justice Health. I had a good idea what was going on in the hep C field, but I have to say the stats were a real eye opener. We've got to keep thinking about hep C because it explodes in jail. Lots of people use for the first time in here. It's because it's boring and using makes the time go easier. The more we know how to prevent hep C, the better.

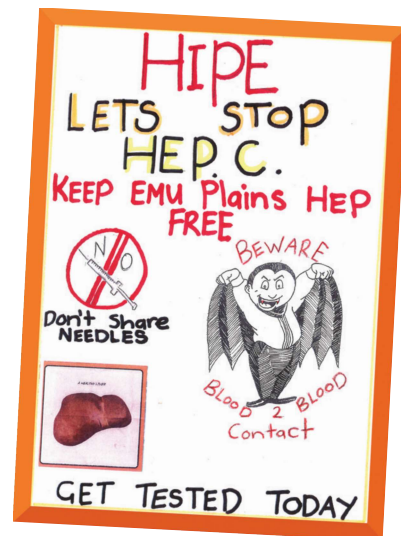
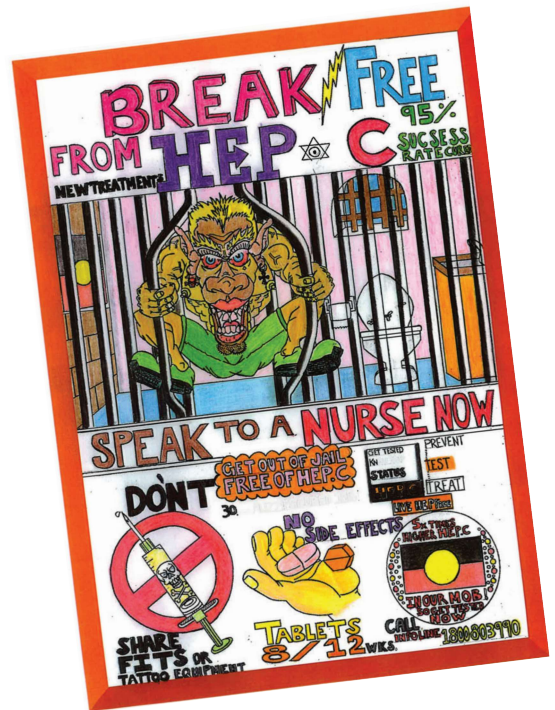
It's fantastic that treatment is available in jail. It's something very positive you can do for yourself while you're here, something good you can do for yourself.

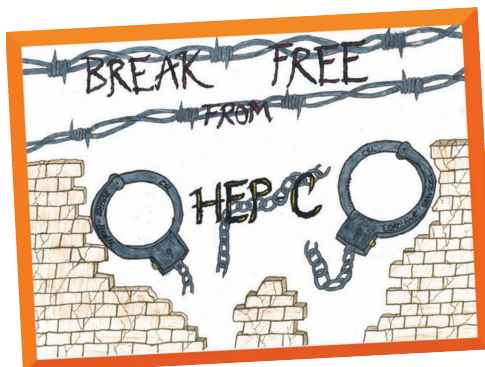
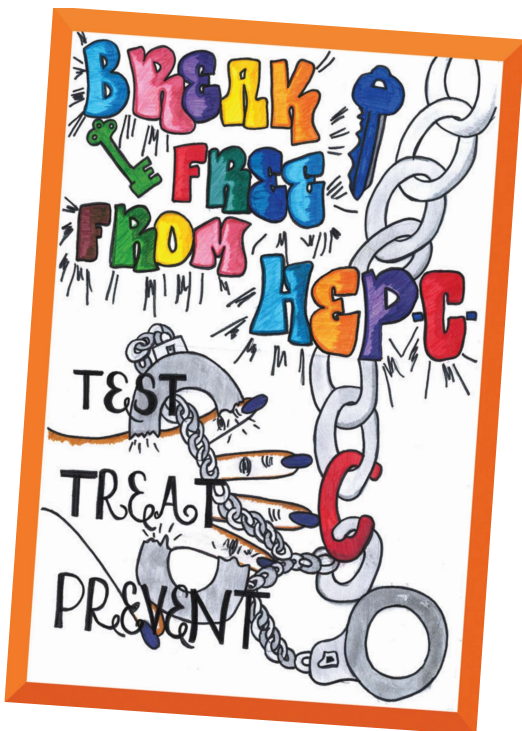
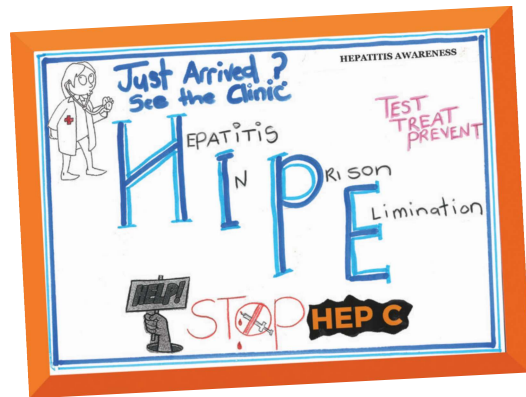
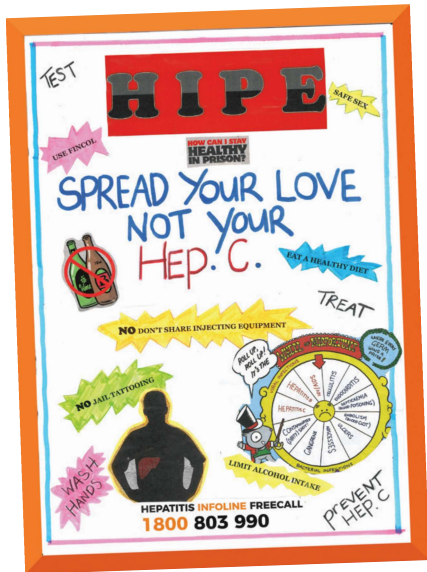
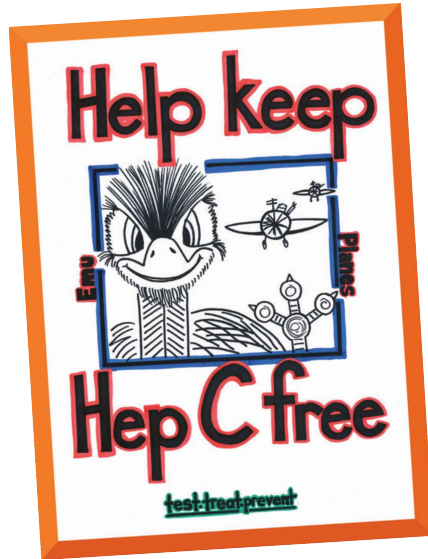
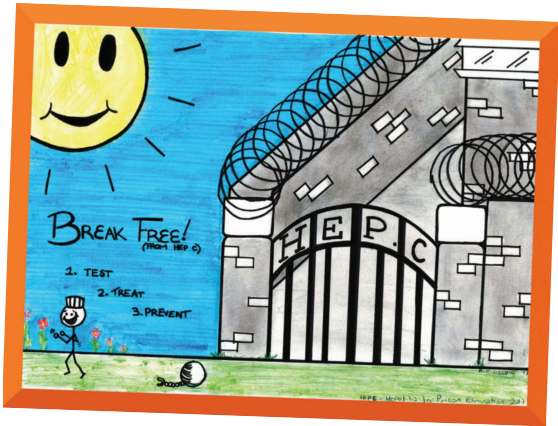
Hep C was holding me back. I'm so relieved to be free of it and now I'm motivated me to get healthy in other ways. All that will really help me focus on looking forward when I get out of here.

USING ART TO SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT HEP C

USING ART TO SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT HEP C

The Justice Health and Forensic Health Network (JHFHN) hold education sessions in jails about hepatitis C called HIPE – Hepatitis in Prisons Elimination. NUAA’s Peerlink workers attend these sessions to provide peer education around harm reduction and hep C prevention. As part of the HIPE sessions, JHFHN holds a poster competition and the winners are put around the health clinics. The inmates were given slogans as well as paper and pens to help them along. Here are some of the cool posters that the men and women inside have come up with!





Cleared Your Hep C? Don't Get It Again!

Remember, hep C can be passed on through:

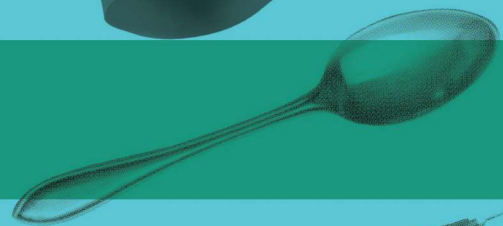
Filters



Tourniquets



Spoons



Syringes (Barrels and Tips)



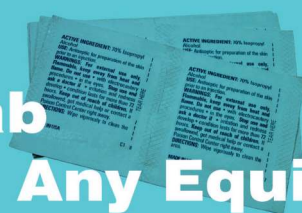
Water



Hands if you're helping someone inject or they're helping you



**Always Swab
Don't Share Any Equipment**



*Sometimes it's
as simple as...*

**TAKING
MORE THAN
YOU NEED**



Needle and Syringe Programs in NSW don't set limits on the amount of equipment you can take away with you. So why not take a little extra, just in case? You don't want to be stuck without new, sterile equipment. Because you never know your luck!

Thomas's Story

How I've Avoided Hep C

Thomas is a young IV drug user who has worked to stay hep C free and looks forward to a safer community.

When I was asked to write about why I'd never contracted hep C, my first thought was I'd just been careful. But then I realised I'd had my fair share of dicey experiences and dirty shots. No matter how careful you "always" are, all it takes is one bad day.

I'm occasionally told I'm "clever", but that's not how I've stayed hep C free either. The more I thought about it, the more I realised that there are many things contributing to my hep C free status.

I began using pharmaceutical opioids at 14. By 16, I was injecting OxyContin and MSContin — a challenge to say the least. I was an IV user for 2 years before ever using with anyone else. I had to do my own research. I read User's News, downloaded Harm Reduction Coalition's "Getting Off Right", and joined online forums about safer injecting practices.

It took a while to find the "elusive" heroin. Just after I turned 17, I finally used heroin at Redfern Station's public toilets. This was not only my first shot of actual heroin, it was the first time I'd injected with anyone else present.

When I questioned the older user — "Shouldn't you be using a filter?" — I was told to hush and handed 0.3mL of golden liquid in a 27g insulin needle. Another first because until then my IV experience had involved a rigmarole of large barrels, wheel filters, 23 and 25g needles, charred metal spoons, microwaves, a lot of trial and error and a terrorised family.

I may have been new to heroin, but I'd been injecting opioids for long enough for this to scare me. I knew enough to not accept a fit prepared by someone else — especially someone who didn't even use a filter. Who knew what other rules they broke? When I inject into MY veins, it's MY way or the highway.

This can be very hard to maintain depending on circumstances and has caused me many headaches. It's not easy to stand up to older, more "experienced" users, even when you know you're in the right.

Having parents with 45 years combined work in the medical field helped me think about my safety, as did working in a high-care facility (hospital) during the first 3 years of my drug use. I learnt a lot about infection control and standard practices around biological waste/hazards.



When I Inject into my veins, it's my way or the highway

That day in the toilet at Redfern Station, I realised the more I learn, the more I need to learn. This foray into “real world” IV drug use motivated me to learn more. I consider myself very lucky to have ready access to the internet, wheel filters and a user base with more nifty tips and tricks than the world’s Swiss Army Knives combined.

It’s not just about keeping myself safe, but those around me safe, so they can keep the circles around them safe.

I have realised that the main reason I am hep C free is because of those who have gone before me. My 5 years is a fairly short using career compared to many UN readers. I owe all those older readers who pounded a hard road of trial and error for high stakes. When I think of how I have been stigmatised and labelled, I find it humbling to think about what it was to use intravenously 10, 20 or more years ago!

I thank those who did the hard yards yesterday so that I can use a little safer today. Because of those leaders, our community is now a safer community in which to use, where more people are better educated about safer injection practices. This keeps it safer for all of us.

Sometimes I notice myself getting careless and lazy, often because of the people I use with. It isn’t until I use with someone fairly new to IV use that I am forced to examine my practices and tighten my regime to set an

example. I want to offer them the best peer education they can get.

Showing new users an injection practice that could be held to the highest standard of the best hospitals in Australia is a good feeling. It sets them up for a future of safe use. This helps to build a safer community.

I always carry twice the amount of fits I think I’ll need, plus an extra one! I try to carry a completely new kit to offer with pride to anyone in need. I encourage my friends to learn about wheel filters, carry spares, practice safer injection and attend workshops, like Naloxone training.

So while I’ve caused myself a few “headaches” by taking safe using seriously, it’s helped me steer clear of some nasty “migraines” like blood borne viruses.

I encourage everyone to be the best version of you that you can, regardless of past experiences. If we all lead by example and encourage others to do their bit, we will be an even safer community.

And if I am ever asked in the future how or why I am still hep C free, I will not forget the importance that writing this article has played in that journey.

WASH BLOOD AND BACTERIA FROM YOUR HANDS!

It's simple. It's quick. It works

WHY?

Hand washing reduces the risk of blood borne virus or a 'dirty hit'.

WHEN?

Always wash your hands before and after injecting yourself and/or others.

HOW?

1. Wet your hands and lather up with detergent or soap.

Tip: Pump packs are best but the trick is to get it super sudsy.

2. Friction is the key! Rub well between each finger, your wrists, front and backs - get in all the creases.

Tip: Rub as long as it takes to sing a verse of happy birthday!

3. Rinse under running water, holding hands down.

Tip. Warm is best if you can get it.

4. Use a paper towel to dry your hands then turn the tap off.

Tip: Paper towel has the least germs. a clean cloth towel is next best. NOT your shirt LOL!



You can't always see blood and bacteria on your skin - but they're there.

ON THE GO?

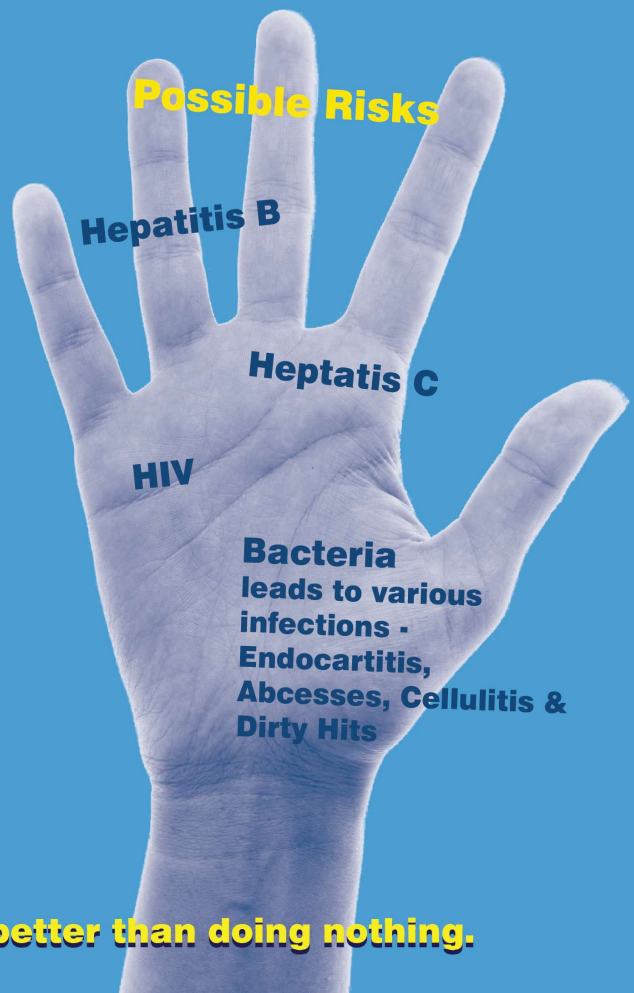
USE FRICTION - RUB WITHOUT SOAP, OR USE SWABS, SANITISER OR FINCOL

WANNA GO TOP DRAWER?

REMOVE DIRT WITH A MEDICAL WASH AND WATER THEN MAKE SURE BACTERIA IS GONE BY USING A SANITISER

FLU SEASON?

HYGIENE ISN'T JUST ABOUT DRUG USE. WASHING YOUR HANDS PROPERLY AND USING A SANITISER AFTER YOU SNEEZE OR COUGH CAN HELP PREVENT TRANSMISSION OF FLU & COLD VIRUSES



Remember! Doing what you can is better than doing nothing.



DO YOU INJECT DRUGS?

COME TO NUAA'S SAFER USING WORKSHOPS



LEARN THE SKILLS YOU NEED TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

- PREVENTING, TESTING AND TREATMENT OF BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES – HEP C
- VEIN CARE ● OVERDOSE PREVENTION
- REDUCING BACTERIAL INFECTIONS

FOR USERS
BY USERS

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Call NUAA on (02) 8354 7300 or FREECALL number 1800 644 413



NUAA is your organisation. We are independent and community based. We aim to advance the health, rights and dignity of people who inject drugs. nuaa.org.au

True or False

Did you know bats aren't blind? Actually, they can see fine – as well as using echolocation. Dogs sweat through their footpads not by panting. Napoleon wasn't short – at 5'5" he was average height for the time but because his Imperial Guards were tall, he seemed short. And the Great Wall of China can NOT be seen from space.

Just because everyone "knows" something, doesn't mean it is true. Or at least, it may not be true anymore! It's time to update the info we have about hep C and make sure our knowledge is still on point. After all, lives depend on it.

Here are several "myths" about hep C that are false or no longer true. Check to see if there is anything listed here that you need to change your mind about!