

From “New Mexico State University” student newspaper

Presenters speak out about Hepatitis C

By: by Diana M. Alba

<http://media.www.roundupnews.com/media/storage/paper474/news/2003/11/13/News/Presenters.Speak.Out.About.Hepatitis.C-556648.shtml>

People should become more aware of the rapid spread of Hepatitis C in the United States and be willing to directly confront issues related to the disease, said three speakers at a public Hepatitis C presentation Wednesday at New Mexico State University.

Richard Darling, a dentist who has Hepatitis C, said approximately 5.3 million Americans have the disease, yet it receives less governmental research funding per year than AIDS, a disease that afflicts significantly fewer people.

Hepatitis C is a virus-caused disease transmitted from person to person by blood, according to a Dartmouth College Web site. Roughly 80 percent of people who contract the virus will progress to a chronic form of the disease, which causes deterioration of the liver.

Darling began the Fair Allocations in Research Foundation in an attempt to change the way the National Institute of Health allocates money for disease research.

Foundation representatives believe research money should be allocated according to the mortality rate caused by a particular disease, Darling said. More money should fund research related to diseases that afflict the greatest numbers of people, he said.

James Hoyt, a Hepatitis C researcher whose wife has the disease, said Hepatitis C has infected about 2 percent of the population.

"Once a greater than 2 percent infusion of (a disease) occurs, a loss to the economy begins," Hoyt said.

The disease kills the most people in the age category of 40 to 45 years old; however, there are significant infection rates from ages 18 on up, Hoyt said.

Hoyt said because people most affected by Hepatitis C make up the majority of the work force, loss of these people - whether by death or by being unable to work - negatively impacts upon the economy.

People should care about Hepatitis C, Hoyt said, because "everyone is going to feel it."

Bill Remak, head of the California Hepatitis C task force, said multiple facets of society and government must be recruited to deal with Hepatitis C.

"It is not something that the health department could do alone," he said. Non-profit organizations, local and state health departments and veterans organizations are some of the groups that can become involved in a task force.

Remak said creating local task forces for regions allows groups specific to a region to become involved in aspects of the disease ranging from awareness and prevention to treatment.

"We would like to see this expand to other states," Remak said.