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## **Press release**

**28 September 2005**

### **“Wake up to hep C” campaign to raise awareness of hepatitis C**

A bay-wide hepatitis C (hep C) awareness campaign to coincide with European Hepatitis C Awareness day on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October has been launched by Safer Communities Torbay.

The “Wake up to hep C” campaign uses a large advertising banner which can be seen in various locations across the bay in the coming weeks. Leaflets and posters are being sent out to services providers working with those people most affected by hepatitis C.

Maureen Bromage of the Eddystone Trust comments; “Hepatitis C is an important public health issue. It’s an issue that needs greater awareness, both to make people aware of the risks it poses, and of how to protect themselves, but also to combat some of the unnecessary fears that can be associated with it”.

The hepatitis C virus is known to be the leading cause of cirrhosis and liver cancer. It’s estimated that at least 200,000 people in England have been

infected with hepatitis C. Symptoms can include tiredness, loss of appetite, weight loss, abdominal pain and jaundice. But in some people, the hep C virus can lie dormant (sleeping) in the human body for many years with no symptoms, so many people are unaware that they have been infected and can pass hep C on to others without knowing. In 2003, there were 750 new diagnoses of the infection across the South West alone.

Hepatitis C is usually caught by blood-blood contact. Transmission routes include:

- Shared drug taking equipment (for injecting and snorting drugs)
- Unsterile tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture procedures
- Blood transfusions before September 1991 in the UK
- There is also a lower risk of it being sexually transmitted

Local registered tattooist Phill Bond has expressed concerns about the number of unregistered tattooing facilities operating within the bay that may not be using the correct sterilisation procedures. He advises; “anyone considering having a tattoo must think really carefully about it and be sure that they go to a reputable, registered parlour. If you are tattooed by someone who does not use the correct sterilisation and infection control techniques you are really taking a chance”.

Harm Reduction Co-ordinator Helen Wilks from Safer Communities Torbay explained; “There are several types of viral hepatitis and it’s easy to get confused. However hepatitis C is one of the more serious types and there is

currently no vaccination to prevent it. But it's good news that effective treatment is available which helps many people seriously affected by hepatitis C to live healthier lives."

Mark, a Torbay resident in his early thirties, was diagnosed with hepatitis C about 4 years ago. He says; "At the moment I'm waiting for a liver biopsy to see about hep C treatment. Sometimes symptoms manifest in tiredness or nausea and I have to be aware of what I eat. I've changed my life and avoid rich/fatty foods as they bring the symptoms on and I try not to run myself ragged any more - other than that it doesn't really affect my life at the moment. I've talked to other people who've already had treatment for hep C - naturally I have some fear about it and I'm not looking forward to it, but I have faith that the treatment is going to clear my liver up."

For more information on hepatitis C contact:

- The Eddystone Trust on 01803 380693
- Speak to your GP
- Visit [www.hepc.nhs.uk](http://www.hepc.nhs.uk)
- The national hepatitis C information line on 0800 451451 (textphone 0800 0850859). Open from 10am-10pm, 7 days a week.

To arrange an interview please contact Rachael Powell in the Safer Communities Office on 01803 841440.

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