

# Join the Search

## Help Find the “Missing Millions”

When she visited her MAHEC family physician for a routine checkup, Grace had no symptoms and no idea that she was living with Hepatitis C.

*I felt fine, but I was deathly ill. It's a silent killer.*  
- Grace

Although doctors are seeing an increase in Hepatitis C patients in conjunction with the opioid epidemic, there are many, like Grace, who have no idea how they got it.

Grace never participated in risky behaviors associated with contracting the virus, but she felt the same stigma.

For Eric, it's important to teach residents and primary care doctors that they can treat Hepatitis C. For a long time, it had been a disease managed exclusively by the gastroenterologist or infectious disease doctor because the medications were not as effective and had a high risk of side effects.

The newer medications, on the other hand, are safe, effective, and able to be managed by a primary care doctor. They have an expected cure rate of 98-99%. But according to the World Hepatitis Alliance, viral hepatitis is one of the biggest global health threats of our time and causes 1.34 million deaths a year. That's why it's important to get tested if you might be at risk.

“Hepatitis C is something that many of our patients are ashamed of even if they don't know where they got it from and don't have a history consistent with the typical Hepatitis C cases,” says Dr. Smith. “They carry this burden with them and to relieve them of that is rewarding for them and for us.”

Grace is one of those grateful patients.

“They didn't treat me like there was a stigma attached to it,” says Grace. “It was nice to be able to go in there and just be treated with dignity. They gave me my life back.”



According to the World Hepatitis Alliance, worldwide 300 million people are living with viral hepatitis unaware. World Hepatitis Day is July 28th, and the organization calls on people to raise awareness and take action in the quest to find the “missing millions.”

Grace was one of the “missing millions,” but thanks to her astute doctor, Amy Santin, MD, she detected the virus, and Grace was able to take part in the MAHEC Hepatitis C Clinic.

For those that contract Hepatitis C, 80% will become chronic, which slowly affects the liver over time. The MAHEC Hepatitis C Clinic was started by Rebecca Grandy, PharmD, and Eric Smith, MD, at the MAHEC Family Health Center at Enka/Candler when they realized the high prevalence of Hepatitis C in the community but a lack of resources to treat it.

*There was a need, and I wanted to be part of the solution.*  
- Rebecca

“Access to treatment in WNC is limited, and often these patients are marginalized,” says Rebecca.

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*“They gave me my life back.”*

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For more information on World Hepatitis Day, please visit [www.worldhepatitisday.org](http://www.worldhepatitisday.org).

MAHEC Family Health Center can now treat



Ask your doctor about screenings, even if you do not have any symptoms.