

Testimony of The Honorable Michael M. Honda

Member, US House of Representatives

June 17, 2010

Chairman Towns, Ranking Member Issa, and Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, thank you for calling this hearing on a national strategy to prevent and address infections related to Hepatitis B (HBV) and Hepatitis C (HCV).

Few people realize how highly infectious viral hepatitis is. Hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV. Few realize that, left untreated, it can cause liver disease, liver cancer and premature death decades after infection. Few realize that roughly 2 billion people worldwide have been infected with hepatitis B, more than 170 million people are chronically infected with hepatitis C, and in this nation alone, an estimated 5.3 million people are infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Tragically, an average of two-thirds of those infected are unaware of their status.

It is no surprise, then, that some are calling this a silent crisis. However, we cannot afford to be silent anymore. In fact, we will not be silent anymore. Why? Because our countrymen and women are dying daily, needlessly, from a disease that is entirely preventable if detected early. Each year, approximately 15,000 people die from liver cancer or liver diseases related to hepatitis B and hepatitis C. That's more than 40 Americans dying every day, with no state or district in our nation exempt from its deadly reach.

Beyond the tragic and preventable loss of human life and its subsequent hit to our country's productivity, the costs to our country are explicitly economic as well. Without effective prevention and vaccination methods in place, chronic hepatitis B and C are expected to cost our country at least \$20 billion in treatments alone over the next 10 years. As a result, over the same time frame, commercial and Medicare costs will more than double. Projecting further out, over the next 20 years, total medical costs for patients with hepatitis C infection are expected to increase more than 2.5 times from \$30 billion to more than \$85 billion.

We must, therefore, change the way hepatitis is diagnosed and treated. The Institute of Medicine released a report on hepatitis and liver cancer with crucial recommendations for a national coordinated strategy for prevention and control

Recommendations include calling for CDC to work with state and local health departments to develop a new model for surveillance.

With the help of Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.) and Reps. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Hank Johnson (D-Ga.) and Charlie Dent (R-Pa.), I introduced the Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control and Prevention Act, H.R. 3974, which mirrors many of

the Institute of Medicine's recommendations. In addition, H.R. 3974, provides almost \$570 million over the next five years to treat hepatitis.

Our legislation focuses federal efforts on a strategy that saves lives and makes our health system more efficient. We bring together the common concerns of the diverse viral hepatitis community to fight chronic viral hepatitis by establishing, promoting and supporting a comprehensive prevention, research and medical management referral program. And we strengthen the ability of the CDC to support state health departments in the prevention, immunization and surveillance efforts.

Through this legislation, and with strategic investments in public health and prevention programs, billions of dollars can be saved, and so can the lives of tens of thousands of people in states and cities all over America. I urge all of you to join me in supporting activities that promote early detection and education. With your help, we can sound the alarm on this silent crisis.

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