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News

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*****Victims of certain liver diseases
too often branded "drunks" and
"dopers"

DALLAS--Too often persons suffering from cirrhosis and hepatitis are also victims of myths which brand them "drunks" and "dopers" by society.

The word "cirrhosis," which means a scarring of the liver, has erroneously become synonymous with "alcoholic." And this is a "bum rap," according to a prominent liver researcher.

Dr. Burton Combes, who has been involved in liver research for many years, says, "While cirrhosis is most often thought of in terms of alcoholism, up to half of the persons suffering from this disease do not have a problem with alcohol. In fact, some have drunk little--or not at all--and, indeed, cirrhosis occurs in both newborn and school-age children," the professor at The University of Texas Health Science Center says.

Another myth prominently associated with liver disease is the "dirty needle" assumption. The picture of a drugged hippie comes to too many people's minds when they hear someone has contracted hepatitis. The truth is anyone can contract this disease.

Frances Henderson of Dallas often suffers from being labeled with either one or both of these stereotypes whenever she tells anyone she has liver disease.

An attractive woman of middle years with the style of a fashion model, she looks you straight in the eye and speaks with an intensity in her manner that assures you of her frankness. "I never even heard of having liver problems unless someone overindulged in alcoholic beverages or got them from a dirty needle--neither thing I'm guilty of."

Hepatitis virus may be present in the blood stream, intestines and saliva or other body contents. The following actions can pass the virus: kissing, sharing or lighting a cigarette or "joint," ear-piercing, having dental work, handling food or sexual contact.

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