

Media Release - Rape is a crime, living with hepatitis C is not

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Hepatitis Australia

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Rape is a crime, living with hepatitis C is not.

Sentencing Richard Lawrence Robinson to 16 years for rape in Brisbane District court on Monday, Judge Michael Shanahan said “It is also a factor to take into account that this was unprotected penile sex when it was clear that you suffered - or you knew you suffered from hepatitis C.”

Hysterical headlines followed, dubbing Robinson ‘Hep C Rapist’ (Courier Mail, May 28) and the ‘Rapist with Hep C’ (Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, Brisbane Times, The West Australian, May 28).

This irresponsible and alarmist focus on the hepatitis C status of Robinson is without any benefit to the community given the fact hepatitis C is not a sexually transmitted infection.

“Rape is a horrendous crime, and Hepatitis Australia expresses our deepest sympathy to the victim. However incorrect and irresponsible reporting of issues around hepatitis C is not in the public interest and only serves to stigmatise the 200,000 Australians with chronic hepatitis C.” said Hepatitis Australia CEO Helen Tyrrell.

Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus, transmitted via blood-to-blood contact. This means blood infected with the hepatitis C virus must come into contact with the bloodstream of another person to effect transmission. This can commonly occur through sharing of equipment used for injecting drugs, tattooing or body piercings. Receipt of blood products prior to 1990 when testing for the virus was introduced also carries some risk as does any unsterile medical procedure which pierces the skin. Whilst transmission through sexual activity is not totally ruled out it is a highly unlikely means of transmission in the absence of blood to blood contact.

That these basic facts about hepatitis C are seemingly unknown is of some concern.

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