



Australian Hepatitis Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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***“Bewitched”* encourages discrimination around hepatitis C**

Hundred of thousands of Australians will be confronted by a tasteless and misleading joke about hepatitis C when they go to see the movie, ***“Bewitched”***, starring Nicole Kidman, which starts today around Australia. While Nicole Kidman is not involved in this piece of action, her starring role in the film may have a major impact on the numbers of Australians watching it and being subjected to this stigmatising attempt at humour.

According to American sources, in the movie the character played by Shirley MacLaine tries to stop the character played by Michael Caine from making sexual advances to women by making them say things to him such as “I have hepatitis C”.

This insensitive joke about people with hepatitis C plays right into and adds to the stigma that many people with hepatitis C have to cope with every single day.

Not only is the comment likely to lead to further discrimination against the affected communities, but it also makes a factually misleading implication that is guaranteed to cause confusion and upset for those people with hepatitis C.

We cannot imagine anyone in Hollywood making a joke about HIV/AIDS in this way. But because the public is so uneducated about hepatitis C, it apparently seems acceptable to trivialise this disease in a comedic context, at the expense of the 250,000 Australians who have hepatitis C, and the many millions more worldwide who are affected.

It is factually misleading because the comment puts out a clear message that hepatitis C is a sexually-transmitted infection and that can be transmitted by casual contact. A raft of recent scientific evidence shows that hepatitis C is not and cannot be considered a sexually-transmitted infection. Hepatitis C is transmitted by blood-to-blood contact when the blood of someone with hepatitis C gets into the bloodstream of another person. Hepatitis C is not present in infectious amounts in saliva, vaginal fluids or semen. Hepatitis C *cannot* be transmitted by kissing, hugging, fondling or petting or anything else that does not involve blood-to-blood contact.

The American Liver Foundation has reacted to this story with a media release which has generated considerable media coverage in the US and now in Australia.

The Australian Hepatitis Council is deeply concerned that the use of this misleading material in the movie will embed the misconceptions about hepatitis C already prevalent in the Australian community – people will leave the movie thinking that you can contract hepatitis C from kissing or touching or through sex and therefore that it is right to shun those with the disease.

This is an exceptionally serious issue. Funded by the Australian Government and the State and Territory Health Departments the Australian Hepatitis Council and its member State and Territory Hepatitis Councils spend every effort to educate the community about hepatitis C – how it is contracted, how it can be prevented, how it can be treated. Movies such as this, starring Australia's best-known and loved actress will be strongly influential in shaping the attitudes of the many Australians who will watch this movie.

The Australian Hepatitis Council has called on the distributor of the film, Sony Pictures Releasing Pty Ltd to include a public service announcement about hepatitis C at every screening of the film and to allow information about hepatitis C to be made available at every cinema screening the film. Hoyts and Greater Union Cinemas have also been contacted with a similar call to action.

Media contacts

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