20 Years And Counting

Been under a rock? POZ recaps the auspicious anniversary of AIDS

August 1, 2001 By Walter Armstrong and Shana Naomi Krochmal

Best unread reporting
Laurie Garrett's mammoth "Legacy of Hope and Despair" for Newsday. No Susie Sunshine, the top AIDS reporter had more questions than answers, and the guts to hold the big guys accountable. An investigation into how the research agenda has ignored many basic unknowns about HIV, the piece is as dense and damning as a legal brief. If only it were...

Most generic slogan
The self-evident "20 Years of AIDS Is Enough" ad campaign was sponsored by a dirty dozen ASOs, from GMHC to SFAF. The in-vague tagline—"Prevent, Care, Remember"—seemed only to confirm the media-soaked masses in their "enough already" attitude. But, hey, "We're all over AIDS."

Worst sign that little has changed
On June 1, South African poster boy Nkosi Johnson died of AIDS at age 12. As critical to improving his country's ("stone 'em") response toward HIVers as Ryan White was in the U.S., Johnson elicited tears and cheers when he spoke at last year's global confab in Durban. But HAART came too late to the big-hearted boy.

Worst sign that much has changed
June international pages from the newspaper of record: All AIDS, all the Times. Stories of the epidemic from overseas bureaus dominated the month's global coverage in papers from New York to Los Angeles. But as the virus spreads, will the AIDS angle become old news even with all the world as a source?

Most moving montage
Nightline—where "every day is an anniversary of something," said senior producer Sara Just—hosted a panel of experts to predict the (dark or darker) future of the epidemic, same as every other network. But then Ted Koppel took a back seat to the 90-second closing segment—photos of 20 story subjects and Nightline staffers who have died of AIDS. It was simple, sincere and said more about the personal impact of HIVers on news than all the day's special logos, "shocking" stats and theme music combined.

Best of show

Three weeks after a tiny turnout in DC for a June 3 action, ACT UP hundreds took to the stormy streets to march on (well, near) the UN as delegates massed for the first-ever special session on AIDS. Chanting “We’re here, we’re wet, it’s time to drop the debt,” the band demanded access to HIV meds and relief of World Bank debt for hard-hit countries.

Worst-behaved guest

When Newsweek invited community advocates to its Manhattan tower to promote its special “AIDS at 20” issue, ACT UP—in the person of Ann Northrop—almost single-handedly turned the lavish lunch into a food fight. She berated Larry Kramer as “preposterously stupid,” told IAVI’s Seth Berkley that vaccine research was a waste of money, blasted her host’s coverage for not focusing on “politics,” and angered African-American diners by seeming to suggest that blacks in Africa should be a higher AIDS priority than blacks in America. Oh, and the arugula was wilted.

Least likely to be quoted

AIDS czar Scott Evertz, who made a single (short, silent) appearance beside HHS head Tommy Thompson at a DC policy conference, was a no-show on the “AIDS at 20” scene. Did the White House give a gag order? Or does Evertz have nothing to offer? (For Doug Ireland’s answer, turn to page 23.)

Best hard data

Kaiser Family Foundation started crunching numbers last year for its third national poll of Americans’ attitudes toward AIDS (click on www.kff.org). Survey says, 55 percent want the feds to spend more money on AIDS here at home. Nine out of 10 want info about condoms in school sex ed. That leaves what’s known as a Moral Minority.

Be careful what you wish for

Even AIDS-weary editors were overwhelmed by the media barrage. At 21, AIDS will soon be old enough to drink at its own party. We’re lifting a glass now to survivors and long-gone friends.

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