Doctor’s Diary

Patients help a positive doc treat himself better

April 1, 2006 By Neal Rzepkowski, MD

My patients occasionally alert me to medical news that I’ve overlooked, making me a better HIV treater. Sometimes, what they share is less technical than practical, making me a better HIV patient.

One patient, Joe Adams, literally gave my HIV therapy a shot in the arm. Like me, he’s been positive for many years. He’s resistant to many meds, and his current combo includes the injected entry inhibitor Fuzeon. He’d had pain and swelling at his injection sites. Since you self-inject Fuzeon twice a day, you can run out of targets if a hard bump arises after each shot. By the time Joe came to tell me his problem, he had solved it. He’d numbed the spot with a cold pack for a few minutes, then injected the Fuzeon more slowly. Result: fewer reactions, more spots to shoot.

Soon after Joe’s visit, I had to change my own combo because my viral load had been rising. My new combo includes Fuzeon.

I injected my first doses; closely following came the site reactions. Ouch! Then I remembered Joe’s tip.

Next time I see him, I’ll thank him for reminding me that sharing experiences makes both patient and provider more savvy to the ins and outs of good treatment—for HIV itself and for all its related problems.

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