Editor’s Letter

RIP Rx

September 27, 2010 By Regan Hofmann

On the cover of this magazine nearly 10 years ago, *POZ* asked, “Whatever Became of the Cure?” I remember, as a reader then, thinking it was a damn good question. In the flurry of congratulatory activity around effective antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, there was too little focus on the end game: eradicating the virus itself.

Don’t get me wrong. I am thrilled ARVs prolonged my life. But, I also wish I didn’t have to take them. Since protease inhibitors debuted in 1996, a great deal of money and energy has been applied to improving the treatment formulations. Newer, more effective, easier to tolerate drugs have played a huge role in compliance, which has led to less drug resistance and better health for people with HIV.

But it is troubling that we haven’t spent as much time, energy and money developing a way to kiss the drugs good-bye forever—a delicious thought suggested by the picture of an empty medicine cabinet on *POZ*’s cover a decade ago.

In that issue, legendary AIDS treatment activist Martin Delaney, founder of Project Inform, prophesied that we would see a functional cure—full viral suppression without ARV therapy—“by 2010, at the very latest.” Tragically, we lost Marty in January 2009, and we still don’t have a cure. In a bittersweet twist, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) named a new research grant after Marty. The grant—$8.5 million a year for five years—will support the search for a functional cure.

The answer to how we find a cure is largely financial. As you will see in our feature story on page 20, while a new grant like this shows a commitment to AIDS research, we aren’t spending anywhere near what the experts say we must to find a cure soon.

Ten years ago, Marty asked, “So should we just give up? Should we tell people to settle for a lifetime of pill-induced misery?” (The answer, of course, is no!)

Today, that question is doubly vexing, because for many people around the world, a lifetime of pills isn’t even an option. The price of keeping tens of millions of people on ARV therapy for the rest of their lives is not a check anyone is prepared, or able, to pick up. We can’t get the drugs to

everyone, and as we explain in “At the End of Your Rope,” there is also another factor—a growing number of people who are running out of treatment options with no new answers readily in sight.

In light of our most dire need for a cure, I ask those of us lucky enough to still be here—thanks, in large part, to treatment activists like Marty—to pick up where he and other advocates left off. Let’s refuse to let another decade go by without getting to say RIP to our prescriptions for HIV.

Because if we don’t find the cure soon, we will bury tens of millions of people. And as Anthony Fauci, MD, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases said when he first saw the millions who needed treatment but weren’t getting it, “This is just something that as human beings we can’t accept.”

I would like to dedicate this issue of *POZ* to the memory of Martin Delaney and all who hoped they would live to see the cure, and did not. May they rest in peace. And may we not rest until we help usher in their dream of the end of AIDS.

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