Letters—September 2011

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Revisiting the Berlin Patient

"Patient No More" (June 2011) by Regan Hofmann discussed how the groundbreaking treatment that cured Timothy Brown—a.k.a. the Berlin Patient—of HIV offers clues for developing a safe, affordable cure for all.

Thank you for the hope. With the uncertainty we are facing, we sure could use some light. I personally won't stop believing that one day, whether in my lifetime or not, a cure for everyone will be discovered and be made available. I encourage everyone else to continue believing that there will be a cure someday.

Mile Vergara
Philippines

An encouraging and hopeful story. But I'm left wondering [if] this certainty that Brown has been cured is a bit overhasty. Undetectable viral levels are common in the course of HIV/AIDS—that is, until they suddenly start creeping up again. I hope that this never happens with Brown and that the disease has been entirely eradicated. Yet the skeptic in me wonders whether this is just a protracted latent phase.

Ed
New York City

Editor's note: You're not alone in your skepticism, but the most sophisticated lab tests haven't been able to detect any HIV in his body—including in places it's known to hide.

The article states that "Brown's virus was using CCR5 to infect his cells." In fact, Brown had dual tropic virus; he had not only CCR5-tropic virus, but also CXCR4-tropic virus. This is one aspect of his cure that remains a mystery. Why did the CXCR4-tropic virus not come back? Maybe it was all destroyed with the chemo.

Henry
New York City

I am so proud of Tim! I am a friend of his, and we lived together [through] his ordeal in Berlin. Today, both of us living in San Francisco, we get to see each other dining, walking around the city or just enjoying the view of the bay…. As we say in Germany after a problem: *Alles ist vorbei* [It's all over]!

Manuel Galvez
San Francisco

There's a large gap in this story, which, if filled in, might be just as interesting as this "cure." When did Brown discover he was HIV positive? What anti-HIV drugs was he using, and for how long, before being diagnosed with AML [acute myeloid leukemia]? Is it possible that those drugs caused his AML?

Tamara
City Withheld

Editor's note: Brown tested positive in 1995 and used different HIV regimens over the years. Whether HIV or his meds played a role in his AML, no one can say.

Homeless, Not Helpless
In "Shelter From the Storm" (June 2011), Cliff Williams talked about his struggles to start HIV treatment during his five-year journey through the Philadelphia shelter system.

What a terrifying situation to be in: homeless and HIV positive. Through ACT UP Philly, Cliff has fought [for] his way and the way for many others to stable housing. Thank him for sharing his story with us-—now that he is properly housed [he is] getting better at taking care of [himself]. But did it have to take five years? The waiting list for housing for many in [Philadelphia] is a waiting list to die! Thank you *POZ* for covering real grassroots, heartfelt issues.

Waheedah Shabazz-El
Philadelphia

I'm a big fan of *POZ* magazine; it's the voice of a lot of people—both the affected and infected—and a venue for their personal stories. You see, when people with the virus step out of the shadows of stigma, that old virus loses its strength. It is up to folks stricken with the virus to share their stories. I call it sacrifice and service. Sure I went through stages with my status; acceptance was hard; and, true, it has been life-changing. I encourage folks who have the virus to educate themselves.

Cliff Williams
Philadelphia

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Letters-SEPT-2011-20918-8320