Mailbox

August 1, 2001

Brassy Tac Sasses Back

Sean Strub's "analysis" of the fight by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and its allies to get HAART to Africans with HIV—"like putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg," he writes—demonstrates, at best, a serious lack of knowledge of the issue (S.O.S., May 2001). TAC, he claims, is treating only the symptom (HIV), not the cause (poverty and lack of public health). This position has been articulated better by the negligent South African government and AIDS drug makers: Fight poverty to save more lives in the distant future rather than using HAART to save people with HIV now.

Getting HAART to HIVers in the developing world should not be trivialized. Even the world's best health-care systems are only slightly useful for people with terminal illness if there are no treatments. At least Strub admits that his own use of HAART is more than a Band-Aid.

To charge TAC with missing the broader issues shows that Strub is seriously misinformed. We have made many calls for investment in health care and a better response to infections like TB. Campaigning for HIV treatment and prevention, income grants for the poor, better social services, reform of trade laws that contribute to under-development are all steps to ending inequality—and poverty.

The Global Trust Fund to support AIDS drug programs will assist millions of HIVers while improving health care, infrastructure and access to all meds. This may make pharmaceutical companies even richer, as Strub fears, but TAC and its allies are making sure that generic substitution and transparent pricing become a reality.

What we need from Strub and others is international solidarity, not trans-Atlantic shrieks of despair.

Zackie Achmat and Nathan Geffen
Treatment Action Campaign
Cape Town, South Africa

Food for Thought

Bravo to Sean Strub for his S.O.S.! HAART meds alone are insufficient to manage the epidemic in hard-hit African countries that don't even have enough food to go around or access to the safe, nutritious fluids required by the complex HAART regimen. I have yet to hear a cogent discussion among policy makers, pharma and the media about how to address food insecurity among

Africans with HIV. Let's hope Strub has started one.

Each one of us in the West has resources to give—if not money, then knowledge, expertise or concern—and we must take time to inform ourselves about what is really happening on the global AIDS scene. American ASOs can reach out to international AIDS community partners and identify actions—such as partnering with a sister ASO in Africa—to make a constructive contribution in hard-hit countries.

Vivica Kraak
Executive Director
AIDS Nutrition Services Alliance
Washington, DC

The Bare Issues

It is interesting to contrast a couple of articles in your May issue. Donald Suggs' cover story ("The Gospel According to St. Rufus," May 2001) on young black men sensitively lays out the various reasons why gay and bi men have unsafe sex: turmoil around coming out; trusting a boyfriend; not valuing oneself; looking for affirmation and affection. Yet turning to POZ's piece on the new prevention campaign from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation ("Assume the Position"), we find a flashy billboard campaign against "barebacking." Isn't there a disconnect here? With rising HIV infection rates in major cities, prevention programs in the doldrums for a decade are being retooled, but will they really speak to us? Do we need to be told yet again to stop being irresponsible bad boys? Or will the message finally get out that HIV transmission most often happens due to deeper issues such as inner turmoil around coming out?

Barry Adam
Professor of Sociology
University of Windsor
Ontario, Canada

Too hot for Rehab

As a counselor for the California State Department of Rehabilitation in a small branch office, I bought a few copies of the February/March 2001 "Spirituality" issue of POZ for our waiting room. The local AIDS support center serves mostly young black gay men and female IV drug users—my potential clients. I thought this particular POZ spoke to them. (I'm also living with AIDS and have just returned to full-time employment after five years on SSDI.) While my boss is supportive of my outreach work, he was required to write me up for leaving the magazine in the lobby. Apparently a department supervisor found it inappropriate due to "graphic language and advertisements for sex toys." While POZ does have graphic language—how else can one talk about sexually transmitted disease prevention?—I cannot find one ad for sex toys in this issue and don't ever recall seeing ads of this nature in any issue. Perhaps a sexy ad for antiviral medication confused them.

Henry Ostendorf
San Francisco

Inmate Update

I am the founder and editor of “HIV + Hope Behind Bars,” a bimonthly newsletter by and for HIV positive prisoners. The newsletter is no longer based in Austin, Texas. Our new address is 962 Mimosa St. South, Salem, OR 97302. Please contact us there.

Johnny C. Smith
Beaumont, Texas

Send letters, including name, address and daytime phone number, to: The Editor, POZ, Box 1279, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10113; or e-mail us at: letters@poz.com. Printed letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret that we cannot answer all mail.

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