Mailbox

January 1, 2006

Cell Plan

"Immuno's Defense" [October 2005] rightly suggests that the future of HIV treatment lies in immune-based therapies (IBT) that enhance the body's immune system—not just antiretroviral meds. But the story omitted stem cell therapies. Stem cells can develop into any body-cell type—and can be modified to create HIV-resistant CD4 cells. Scientists already have promising results using adult stem cells. Embryonic stem cells hold even greater promise. With state initiatives like California's providing funding and support, unlocking the potential of these one-celled wonders is only a matter of time.

Jeff Sheehy
San Francisco

It's refreshing to see IBTs coming back into focus. While some of the work remains controversial, a few key areas of IBT research look very hopeful. Anyone inspired to get involved with IBT advocacy should consider joining the AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition's Vaccines and IBT Working Group (http://www.atac-usa.org).

Cathy Olufs
Los Angeles

Watch Your Wait

"Wait-Lifting Stretches" [October 2005] says that AIDS Drug Assistance Programs (ADAPs) will receive a $10 million increase this year. But the 2006 spending bill funding state ADAPs has (as of press time) not yet cleared Congress. It's still possible the program could see cuts. According to the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), of which I am the deputy executive director of domestic programs, over 2,000 individuals in nine sates are already on ADAP wait lists. Many more people will join if cuts occur. To alleviate existing lists, prevent more restrictions to access and keep 150,000 Americans from losing their medications, ADAP funding must increase by more than the $10 million.

Murray Penner
Washington, DC

Dwelling On Aids

Thank you for highlighting the nation's AIDS-housing crisis and my organization, the AIDS Housing Alliance San Francisco ["Home Work," October 2005]. The calls poured in from people in need. The article says that we can demolish San Francisco's AIDS-housing crisis for $4 million. What I meant

is that $4 million a month could subsidize the employment of HIVers in need of housing help. Housing subsidies alone cannot fix the problem. We need solutions like part-time jobs to supplement disability. I'm begging your readers to do what we did and start an AIDS Housing Alliance in their community. All it takes is a desk and a phone.

Brian Basinger
San Francisco

I was one of AIDS Housing Alliance San Francisco's first clients. As someone dependent upon a housing subsidy, I was having problems finding suitable housing for my dog, Tina, and myself. The Alliance welcomed me with caring and responsive assistance. Not only did they locate a suitable apartment, they also helped me through the complications of subsidy paperwork, landlord negotiations and agency coordination with good humor, great efficiency and genuine concern. Arye Michael Bender San Francisco

I Feel For You

I agree with "The Common Touch" [October 2005] about the importance of physical contact for well-being. The feeling of someone touching you can become as addictive as any drug, but we tend to take it for granted. Once the feeling is taken away, we discover how much we crave it. After I lost my 34-year-old partner of 12 years to a heart attack, I discovered just how important something so simple can be. And now that it seems my family and friends have dropped me because I have HIV, I miss that pat on the back for a good job and the outreached hand of an uncle or hug from an aunt greeting me when I come in the door.

John Lloyd Kiser
Ashland, Kentucky

Here She Is...

I'm glad that you singled out some beauty pageant babes for their HIV advocacy ["Miss Congeniality," October 2005]. But I want to add another proud diva to that mix: Olena Rubin, last year's Miss Hawaii and Miss America contestant. Olena made HIV her platform. Throughout her state reign, she focused her energies on bringing much- needed attention to the travails and successes of our local HIV community.

Vincent Fernandez
Honolulu

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