Meds: The Sequel

A filmmaker tames a tough costar

January 1, 2006 By Laura Whitehorn

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Documentary Filmmaker, Diagnosed 2001

The Script: You've heard people say, "I was fine until I took the meds." That's me. I felt OK when I tested positive, despite having 50 T cells and a 600,000 viral load—like someone who'd had HIV for ten years, my doctor said. As soon as I started the meds, I had vomiting and diarrhea. My doctor said, "Try again."

The Motivation: I told myself, "Yes, the meds are chemicals your body isn't used to. But what's your choice if you want to live?"

The Action: I controlled diarrhea with more fiber and less fat and timed my doses so nausea didn't disrupt my entire day. I sniffed lemons and did a lot of lying around.

The Crew: My doctor said the side effects would pass. You need someone to talk you through it, not just tell you to appreciate that you have meds. Family support is key to my adherence. When I travel, there's a designated "take your meds" reminder.

The Climax: I started getting better, and improved lab numbers encouraged me to adhere. A once-a-day combo makes it easier—I take it at night when I brush my teeth.

The End: Yes, the pharmaceutical industry needs to change. But that doesn't change the fact that my meds are helping me—and that I should take them.

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