Network News

It’s 1995: Do you know what your modem is? A direct line to AIDS news—and chitchat

July 13, 2011 By Michelle Delio

The AIDS pandemic has etched this lesion into my brain: We can and must take care of each other because no one is going to do it for us. The proliferation of AIDS treatment newsletters has nurtured an unprecedented multilateral dialogue among researchers activists and people with AIDS that has redefined the role of the physician and given power to the patients.

It has also created a lot of clutter (so many subscriptions) and frustration (so little time). Fortunately, there’s a way to get plugged-in that doesn’t involve newsprint stains: Plugging into the Internet.

Put simply, the Internet I like a gigantic party line, only instead of shouting into a phone and trying to be heard among the voices, you’re typing (or “posting”) messages and reading other people’s posts in a controlled, organized manner. The Internet is the foundation of the infamous “information superhighway,” including the world’s e-mail system.

It’s the perfect set-up: Vitally concerned people all over the globe sharing every scrap of information they have—from reprints of magazine articles to personal diatribes—with no thought of patents, awards or royalties. There is no red tape either: Just log on, start typing and your message will be read around the world seconds after you post it, or you can read the posts of others.

One can access the Internet in one of two ways: Through an account with one of the commercial services such as America Online (AOL) or CompuServe, or via a shell or SLIP/PPP set-up with an Internet access provider. Each method has its own special benefits and drawbacks. My solution was to wantonly sign up with everybody—yes, I am a cyber slut. More prudish folks may want to take advantage of those free trial periods to comparison shop.

Commercial services are easy to use, which also makes them slow. All those multilayers of menus and pretty icons mire you down. And time is money on the Net.

AOL and CompuServe are two of the largest and best known of the commercial services they are not part of the Internet, but they do offer virtually complete access to the Internet, along with other features. All offer free trial periods—get the details on whatever current deals they’re

offering by picking up any computer or Internet magazine (a start-up disk will probably fall out like one of those irritating blow-in cards).

AOL has a comprehensive HIV resource section but you have to really look to find it. The HIV Resource Section is found in the "Clubs and Interests" section of AOL's main menu under the Gay and Lesbian Forum (and who says you have to be gay to be HIV positive?) the forum offers an extensive set of databases and print resources. Its heart and soul are the message boards, where AOL members share their stories about life with HIV—a global support group that meets in your living room (or wherever you've got your computer parked) 24 hours a day. With discussions ranging from "The Worst Year of My Life" to "The Lighter Side of HIV," this forum will get you through the dark times and help you appreciate the good ones.

CompuServe is the primo service for serious research. Here you can search the Comprehensive Core Medical Library, which contains current editions of all major medical reference works and textbooks, plus prominent general journals, including the New England Journal of Medicine. You can also access "Paperchase," an online information service that lets you search the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE and AIDSLINE databases. "AIDS News Clips" automatically searches all the major news wires and retrieves any and every article printed that pertains to HIV. This is the simplest way to stay up to date.

In order to access the "real" Internet, you need to find a local provider. A good start if you have e-mail is to send an e-mail to Celestin@olympus.net and ask for their huge list of direct Internet providers.

The Internet's collection of HIV resources is so wide-reaching that there is no way to even begin to list all the worth-while sites available without writing a telephone directory—size book. While we can't begin to teach you how to use them (although it's not as hard as it seems) here are some types of services:

Usenet. Usenet is a huge, sprawling collection of conversations. People rant, scream, threaten, support, flirt, bitch and babble on Usenet. Think of it as a huge café in cyberspace.

This is where you'll find SCI.MED.AIDS, one of the most valuable resources for people concerned about AIDS. And while you're in Usenet check out the ALT (alternative) groups. Besides some truly weird stuff, ALT also has discussions about more serious subjects such as drug-approval policies and the policies of sex. ALT is also where you'll find almost all of the much-publicized hardcore porn that's available on the net. Sex doesn't get much safer than this!

Mailing Lists. Want an expert who'll happily send you the most vital and pertinent news concerning whatever field you're interested in on a daily (if not hourly) basis? Subscribe to a mailing list. Some lists are interactive (list members can respond to each other's posts); others just circulate information. Here are two of the best HIV lists:

Activism. This forum features discussion of the work being done by the various ACT UP chapters

worldwide, events announcements, exchange of ideas related to AIDS activism, and the politics of AIDS and health care. To subscribe, send email to: act-up-request@world.std.com with the words “Subscribe ACT UP Please” in the message areas.

Support. HIV-Support is a discussion list for emotional support and sharing of medical information for people living with HIV or AIDS. To subscribe, send E-mail to: lists@web-depot.com with the words “Subscribe HIV Support Please” in the message area.

World Wide Web. The Web, which compares to the Internet like TV compares to the telegraph, has revolutionized cberspace. Using a program called a web browser, oyou can effortlessly connect to home pages around the world. A gome page is similar to an online magazine, complete with photographs (and some even have sound and video). You can access the Web on virtually all on-line services, but it runs very slowly. A tolerable speed can be achieved only over a SLIP/PPP accounton a computer equipped with a high-speed modem (14,400 baud is really the bare minimum).

There are literally hundreds of home pages devoted to HIV info. One of the best all-in-one sources is Marty Howard’s HIV/AIDS Site, and it’s a great example of the interconnectivity if the Web. From Marty Howard you can “surf” from one AIDS home page to another. His one address will open up a world of new sites. The address is http://www.smartlink.net/~martinjh/.

The best thing that the Internet offers you is the ability to connect with like-minded folks around the world. Since the Internet is a community based on the free dissemination of knowledge, people share what they know without questioning whether they’ll get some sort of payback in exchange for their expertise. They know that someday soon they’ll need to rely on the kindness of a stranger to answer their queries too. Knowledge is power, so reach out and grab yourself some. See you in cyberspace!

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Network-News-HIV-20815-8486