Reignite the Fight

May 1, 2012 By Regan Hofmann

When exactly did those of us living with HIV stop fighting for our lives?

1996. That year, protease inhibitors hit the market, bringing people living with AIDS back from the brink of death.

Securing life-sustaining drugs was a hard-won victory. When HIV was rendered a “chronic” condition, everyone heaved a collective sigh of relief.

Many people erroneously thought AIDS was over. Though the crisis didn’t end, it wasn’t out of control in quite the same way it had been. But the misperception that AIDS had become “manageable” bred dangerous complacency. The press stopped writing about it. People stopped talking about it. We stopped teaching our kids about it. We stopped protecting ourselves against it.

HIV is only “manageable” for the 6 million people with HIV who are on treatment. And manageable is a relative term. People accessing treatment still suffer from serious side effects, multiple drug resistance and non-AIDS health complications. Even for those on treatment, the risk of serious illness remains. For the other 28 million HIV-positive people worldwide—including 750,000 Americans—sickness and death will come just as they did before we had the pills. On World AIDS Day 2011, President Barack Obama pledged to put an additional 2 million people into care, bringing the global total to 8 million by 2013. But even if that target is met, 26 million lives still hang in the balance. And, every day, more become infected.

Don’t get me wrong. Treatment remains key: We must treat as many of us as we can to keep us alive while we hunt for the cure. Treating more people with HIV will help slow the spread of the virus because the drugs can simultaneously reduce the risk of transmission by up to 96 percent. Treatment will likely be part of a cure. But treatment should be a means to an end, not the endgame. The only way to truly end AIDS is to cure it.

We are closer to the cure than many think. Recent significant breakthroughs mean a cure could be found in our lifetimes. The more we invest, the greater chance we’ll live to see it.

The community of people living with HIV and our supporters must unite in battle to fight for the cure for AIDS. We must pursue it with the same ferocity as those before us fought for lifesaving treatment.

Which is why we want you, and your friends, to join the POZ Army. If we use the collective voice and power of POZ's audience, we can reignite the fight. Turn to page 34 to find out how a rare confluence of events—the XIX International AIDS Conference and the return of the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Washington, DC, in July and the ongoing presidential race—provides a perfect storm of opportunity for our community to secure the political and financial capital we need to cure AIDS.

Back in the '90s, several hundred members of the legendary AIDS activist group ACT UP helped save 6 million people. They did it without today's technology and social media. With your help, the POZ Army will fight to save the remaining 28 million and counting....

Go to pozarmy.com to enlist today.

Regan Hofmann
Editor in Chief
Email: editor-in-chief@poz.com

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