Retiring the Ribbon

October 10, 2011 By Regan Hofmann

The end of AIDS. Doesn't that have a wonderful ring to it? It has always been my dream: to live long enough to see science and society finally get the upper hand on HIV. Wouldn't it be just incredible if HIV went the way of smallpox or polio? New scientific evidence and some compelling modeling suggest that if we make the right strategic investments today we can significantly ramp up treatment and prevention efforts that can stop the spread of HIV dead in its tracks.

This past year—ironically the 30th anniversary of the first recorded cases of HIV—we have seen game-changing breakthroughs in our understanding of both how HIV works and the methods we can use to best combat the virus. From the notion that treatment works as prevention in people living with HIV as well as those who are not, to advancements in cure, microbicide and vaccine research, we are in a brave new world of AIDS science.

The most important voices in science are saying something we've never heard before: AIDS could be history in our lifetime. Now our task is figuring out how to evolve the question from, "Can we end AIDS?" to "How will we end AIDS?"

That's what we've tried to do with our feature story on page 30, "R.I.P. HIV." The challenges and barriers to ending AIDS are many, and not inconsequential. But fresh knowledge and evidence provide us with the kind of opportunity that comes once in a lifetime, maybe a few times in a century. With enough money, political will and the right implementation plan, we can rewrite the ending of one of the worst stories ever told so that it is one of triumph, not endless tragedy.

The trick will be securing the political and financial capital necessary to allow us to implement the strategies and apply the tools that can permanently hinder HIV's forward progress. Yes, we need more money. And we need some fresh thinking about where it comes from. We must reposition our arguments for why the world should underwrite the end of AIDS. And to do that, we need a new surge in leadership and advocacy at both the highest and most grassroots levels within the HIV/AIDS community.

As I watch the news and see children suffering in Somalia, I ache that the world's not able to resolve that crisis and others like it. Tragically, because of a variety of geopolitical reasons, hundreds of thousands of Somalian people are likely to die of starvation only thousands of miles away from food that could keep them alive.

This is not unlike what's happening with HIV on a global scale. We have 33.3 million people with

the virus and only 6 million in care. AIDS is a tragedy we can start stopping today. And because we can, it should be our moral imperative to do so.

The AIDS pandemic is at a tipping point. Those who seize this moment are likely to be rendered immortal in history—while preventing tens of millions of people from becoming ghosts before their time.

We can end AIDS. Together, we can live to see the day when we can finally lay the Red Ribbon to rest on HIV's headstone.

I don't know about you, but I'd like to dance on the damn virus's grave before I go.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Red-Ribbon-HIV-21232-1638