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On becoming a survivor

June 1, 1994 By Sean Strub

If I were a woman and had suffered from breast cancer five years ago, today I would be considered a breast cancer survivor. But even though I have survived HIV for 15 years, I am still considered terminally ill. How much time must pass before I am considered a survivor instead of terminally ill?

Language is important. It influences how society, politicians and healthcare providers view people with AIDS. Most important, it influences how we view ourselves.

If we believe ourselves to be terminally ill, then we void everything else about our lives. Our love, passion, vision and vitality. Our hopes and dreams. We might as well just plan the funeral and wait to die.

But if we are survivors, we have a future. Something to survive for. Places to go. People to meet. Things to do. Love to share.

POZ can’t be shy about covering death, nor the ugly, painful and vicious aspects of AIDS. But we will aggressively cover the issues that survivors must face: Falling in love, breaking up, getting fired, getting promoted, making decisions about treatment, travel, financial planning, politics and other issues.

And the POZ party line -- such as any will exist -- will fall on the side of giving greater choice to the individual, a healthy dose of skepticism at anything presented as conventional wisdom about AIDS and rejecting the my way or no way mentality that pervades much of the debate about anything AIDS-related.

There is not a single right answer to any question about AIDS. Ask any group of survivors; each will have as many different successful strategies as there are different individuals.

Every morning I wake up is another morning when I am a survivor. I hope you are, too.

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