To the Editor

June 1, 1998 By Staff

Holiday In

Whether they like it or not, the HIV positive men and women you feature are poster boys/girls and role models for thousands of people who read POZ. Of the three individuals profiled in the March 1998 issue who discussed HIV medications—Phil Reed, Phill Wilson and Keith Christopher—only one admitted to adhering to his medication: Phil Reed. The fact that Wilson and Christopher were given space to advertise their "drug holidays" without a dialogue on the subject or any rebuttal information on the dangers of creating drug resistance is irresponsible. I'd be curious to see if you will profile their future hospital stays or mention their choice (rightfully theirs) of a "high quality of life" in their obituaries.

Tony Zimbar
Los Angeles

Ruled Out

The part of me that wants to laugh was in tune with some of "The Rules" (March 1998). The part of me that is new to AIDS—I was diagnosed in December—was repulsed by the satire. I'm now scared living my life, and I'm attempting to address that fear with know-ledge and confidence. One of the first ways I did that was buying POZ.

It's not that I can't roll with the punches. I guess it hadn't been the best of weeks and the bitchy, arch tone of this column was stale and ugly to me. You are right, Mr. Hamilton-Little: AIDS has not self-actualized me.

Mark Price
Bloomington, Indiana

PEP Talk

our article on post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) made a point of establishing that no one knows what PEP will do to current prevention efforts, but I can let you know what it did for me ("Hard to Swallow," March 1998).

I am a sexually active gay male in my mid-20s living in San Francisco. You might expect that being well-educated, working for a well-known gay health organization, going to about a million HIV

conferences and simply being constantly reminded of the impact of AIDS from living in the heart of the Castro might stop me from engaging in unsafe sexual behavior. It did not.

Someone I had sex with told me he was negative, and we fucked each other without protection. When it came time for him to pull out, he didn't quite make it, and admitted that he has actually been positive for five years. I knew about the PEP program in San Francisco because of my policy work, so I went straight home and signed up.

After some initial nausea and sleeping problems, I spent the entire month really fatigued. Not so bad, considering the side effects friends have experienced, but nonetheless enough to give me a clear idea that I don't want to spend any amount of time on these drugs. Since the program ended, my sex life has safened up significantly, based on the month-long experience of toxic drugs, blood tests, intensive counseling, more tests and
more counseling.

I do know that PEP has not encouraged unsafe sex for me. In fact, the experience has done for my sexual safety what my education, community prevention campaigns and my gay health advocacy career could not: It promoted it.

Peter Sawires
Gay and Lesbian
Medical Association
San Francisco

Soldier's Story

Donnell Stockley is a friend of mine (S.O.S., February 1998). He served time with me at the U.S. Armed Services' Disciplinary Barracks. I am here for the same "crimes" he was convicted of. I also did not transmit the virus. The military expert told the panel I had five years to live, but it only took them 15 minutes to find me guilty—of four counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, one count of disobeying orders and one count of adultery—and five minutes to sentence me to 10 years.

All parties involved in consensual sex should take responsibility. But decisions should not all be placed on the HIV positive person, nor should all the blame. If someone is intentionally trying to transmit HIV, then that person is wrong and should be punished. Those fulfilling basic human needs because they are confused and looking for support do not deserve a prison sentence, but rather education and moral support.

Brian T. Warden
U.S. Disciplinary Barracks
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Head Games

Congratulations on another great issue. I loved "The Rules." But when I turned to Gazette, my

attention was drawn to the headline “This Just In! Giving head can cause AIDS.” Naturally, I was interested—after all, this is one of the lowest-risk sexual acts, and I love oral sex. When I read the article, which had nothing to do with oral sex, I got the cuteness of the headline in relation to the story, but too many people read only the headlines. Please be more careful.

Michael Beatty
Denver

In for Theft?

I glanced at your March issue, having borrowed it from my neighbor. I read, I laughed, I learned. Patrick Donnelly’s poem, “The Tea Drinkers” was brilliant. Kudos, too, to Dr. Mahlon Johnson’s “Brain Storm” and the exquisite Dominic Hamilton-Little for “The Rules” (Heloise and Oscar Wilde meet *The Lonely Guy*). Bravo!

Kal Elliot
Avoyelles Correctional Center
Cottonport, Louisiana

ARIS-tocrats

The best part of *POZ* is the letter from the editor. The March 1998 S.O.S. is, once again, so on target. Sean Strub could be writing about our local AIDS group, ARIS (AIDS Resources, Information and Services of Santa Clara Valley, California). Its employees—there are way too many—are completely out of touch with what living with HIV is about. Egos run rampant throughout the group, and the tension in the building is so thick it is hard to breathe.

I had dropped my campaign to attempt to change things about a year ago, but your article got me going again. I sent a copy to the powers-that-be at ARIS, and will follow your advice to work toward getting people with HIV on the board. Hell, maybe I’ll just force myself upon them and insist on becoming a board member.

Garrett Paulus
Via the Internet

Final Cut

Your readers may want to believe Dr. Edgar Schoen (“The Cutting Edge,” February 1998) because he is a doctor. But they may think twice when they learn that he is also a *mohel*, a Jewish ritual circumciser.

Doctors Opposing Circumcision is particularly concerned with the 98 percent of American males who are not Jewish. They have no reason to have a circumcision and it is tragic that anyone might mislead them. No one, especially not a doctor, has the right to remove a normal sexual organ from another human being.

George Denniston, MD
Via the Internet

Dr. Edgar Schoen's latest attempt to con those of us in Europe into routine circumcision met with robust refutations from doctors here, as did his last ill-judged and inaccurate effort some 10 years ago. What bothers Schoen about the European experience is that it disproves the scare-mongering that he and others peddle. HIV rates in Europe are about a quarter of those in the United States, a mainly circumcised country with HIV rates on a par with sub-Saharan Africa. What should concern all of us, gay or not, is that we should have our bodily and functional integrity respected—and our sexual mechanism left intact.

George Denniston, MD
Via the Internet

Your choice of wording in "The Cutting Edge" deserves scrutiny. It is cultural blindness to label as "fanatics" those who appreciate the unaltered beauty and full-functioning of intact men. Such remarks echo those of African traditionalists, who similarly label as "fanatics" those who prefer uncircumcised women.

Bernhard Vey
San Francisco

If you wear rubbers like you are supposed to, cut or uncut doesn't matter.

Richard Games
Denver

Front-Page Nus

As an HIV positive woman, I was amazed at Richard Goldstein's article, "Criminal Body," that seemingly condoned Nushawn Williams' behavior (February 1998). Normally, I agree that when it comes to sex both parties have a responsibility. But Williams more than abused his right to confidentiality.

I have always taken umbrage that our government chooses to lump all people with HIV together. I have met many folks with HIV—some are responsible, some are not. We have basically been taught to be apathetic when it comes to those who are not, or we are considered Benedict Arnolds of the AIDS movement.

I do not believe that I am a traitor to the HIV community if I refuse to support those who exhibit behavior like Williams'. It is sad that our more responsible folks are too afraid to step forward so they can be front-page center for a change.

Melissa Dugas
Savanna, Illinois

Wart's New, Pussycat?

I've been fighting *molluscum contagiosum* for two years, and it was comforting to read about a problem I can relate to ("Warts and All," February 1998). I went to my dermatologist, hoping to have them burned off. He prescribed a topical gel called Retin-A, which he said would kill the smaller warts, and he'd freeze off any that survived. The good news was that none survived, and I have been using Retin-A to painlessly control all my new outbreaks. (This method would not work internally.)

Stephen Hines
Newark, Ohio

A Pair of Pariahs

Stephen Gendin ("At the End of My Hope," February 1998) isn't the only pariah raining on the protease parade. Many of us who have used antiretrovirals diligently for years as advised by the "experts" still find the virus resistant. It seems that the pharmaceutically naive have plenty of drugs available and that it's time for drug manufacturers to focus on developing and testing drugs that could prove more effective against these resistant strains.

R.R. McLoud
San Francisco

She's the Source

Thank you for the accurate representation of Arizona's AIDS Drug Assistance Program in "ADAP Tapped" (February 1998). Your writer did a fine job capturing the important information about the current state of our ADAP. I do, however, think it would have been appropriate to acknowledge me as the source for the information.

Linda Kroger
Coordinator, ADAP
Arizona Dept. of Health
Phoenix

This Little Light

From its inception, POZ has been a gift. Regrettably, I note over time that its theme has moved from "we shall overcome" to "God, what a mess"—a reflection of reality. I flipped through your February 1998 issue and learned, with horror, why I can barely button my pants and why I'm at the doctor each week for some skin phenomenon. However this all turns out, Sean Strub has served humanity as few have—providing facts in the face of lies, allowing us to identify our burdens with his, and fighting like mad when most have forsaken the fight that is our only hope.

Michael Aldridge
Via the Internet

Sight for Sore Eyes

After checking my eyes with the Amsler Grid you ran, I noticed some slight distortion in my right eye ("Good Gridlock," January 1998). I immediately called my ophthalmologist, and after an examination I was diagnosed with early-stage CMV retinitis. I have received a Vitrasert implant in my eye and get biweekly cidofovir infusions. This all occurred within one month. Without your story, I have no doubt my vision would have gotten much worse before I noticed. Now I have a very good chance of keeping the vision I have.

John Kilker
San Francisco

Sinequan Non

I'm an AIDS Certified Registered Nurse (ACRN) and coordinator for the New Jersey AIDS hotline. The incident reported in Gazette's "Rub a Drug Flub" (February 1998) is not an isolated one. We may send copies of the article to medical facilities on our Poison Information mailing list because you can never remind professionals enough about the dangers of medication errors. The person who took Sinequan in the quantity that you take saquinavir is lucky to have survived.

Wilma Pomerantz, ACRN
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Mother Tongue

As a mom who lost her son to AIDS in September 1995, I still read your magazine. My boy had AIDS for 10 years, and my husband and I stuck by him the whole time. He had many friends whose parents disowned them because they were gay. They know not what they miss in life. These are our children, and are warm, loving, caring, hard-working people.

My son was 33, had a great job and lived in Houston. He came home to die and be with us. What a sad death. He was bitter toward the government, as many of his friends had no health care and could not afford the expensive medicines to stay alive.

E.G. Barse

Holiday, Illinois

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E.G. Barse
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