To the Editor

October 1, 1998

Bending the Rules

I read the cover article on Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, and I believe you relaxed your editorial standards somewhat in the service of celebrating a friend and mentor ("The Good Doctor," July 1998). I am neither an opponent nor a proponent of Dr. Sonnabend's views, but an AIDS advocate and social worker who would like to understand his theory and approach to the treatment of people with AIDS. The article was long on the doctor's heroics and short on explanation of his views and practices. Your readers deserve a less biased, more educational report.

Diana Yates
Staten Island, New York

A Shot on the Web

Good for you for publishing a well-written article on HIV vaccines ("Dying for a Vaccine," July 1998). There is a huge amount of information about HIV vaccines on the Internet at these websites:

<www.niaid.nih.gov/daids/vaccine>
<www.who.org/gpv>

Also, a new report on the progress of HIV vaccine research by the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition can be downloaded from its website or ordered by calling 202.387.5517.

Sam Avrett
AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition
Washington, DC

Maggie May

Maggie Atkinson seems to have tackled the issues concerning the Canadian HIV Trials Network and other AIDS organizations in Ontario on a personal as well as a political level ("Maggie's Law," July 1998). The impact she has made restores my hope. Ms. Atkinson brings compassion and unity to the fight against this deadly disease. Health secretary Donna Shalala should do us all a favor and consider retiring and taking notes from Ms. Atkinson. What a difference could be made if there were more people like her.

William Parrish

Northern Nevada Correctional Center
Carson City, Nevada

Riding Rofes

Eric Rofes' book excerpt was inflammatory ("AIDS Is Over," July 1998). I found his assumptions about changes in the AIDS epidemic to be premature and ill-informed. Postexposure prophylaxis is expensive. Is Rofes proposing sexual "freedom" for the wealthy and not for the indigent? It wouldn't surprise me, since his discussion is so narrow that it focuses only on his concern for the sexual freedom of gay men without acknowledging the need for sexual expression among the rest of the population.

Sue Gibson
Dallas

India Ink

The article about Ashok Row Kavi and HIV in India was absolutely fantastic ("Ashok to the System," July 1998). Now I want to know more about how concerned Americans can help.

Stacy Kapur
AIDS Resource Alliance
Orlando, Florida

Send a Ticket

I love your magazine very much, especially July's Global Issue. Here's a suggestion for the next one: AIDS in the Caribbean—from Haiti to South America. Island-hop, if you have to.

Andrea Albert
Staten Island, New York

Body Heat

As a bisexual feminist, I both admire Ms. June's physique and dismiss its relevance to HIV positive women's struggles ("Some Like It Hot," June 1998). My irritation with POZ's back-to-back coverage of body beautiful and body ugly ("Body Snatchers," June 1998) is that its drastic comparison blasphemes the dignity of women who are burdened by protease horrors but courageous enough to reveal it. I now also cope with a lost waistline, top-heavy chest and buffalo hump, and I am horrified to see that my sisters' stories of grief are preempted by a glorification of the fleeting beauty we have lost. I challenge POZ to follow with a deeper perspective of women's issues, honoring the feminine spirit that is unbounded by our fickle physical form.

Joy K. Halme
Project Quest
Via the Internet

I couldn't help but feel insulted and angered at the cover portrayal of Rebekka Armstrong. The message you are sending out is that women must bare themselves to be noticed in any way, even in the pages of your magazine. I am shocked that women continue to be objectified and treated on only a sexual level. Will women ever be taken seriously as whole human beings? Must we always be used to sell products such as your magazine?

I urge you to take a closer look at how you portray women. Sexism and every other "ism" out there should not be tolerated. It makes me question who you are writing POZ for. Without a doubt, it appears to be written by and for men. Women remain outsiders, only viewed and portrayed as men would like to see them.

N. Roubinian
San Francisco

"Body Snatchers" finally said, in print, things I had complained about to my ex–HIV doctor. I never had a visible vein on my body, and suddenly I had these big, ugly veins on my legs. My friends kept asking if I had a boob job because I got big boobs and a big gut, and skinny legs and arms. And my ass, which used to be fat, was suddenly flat. My doctor denied that these things were due to the protease inhibitors, but they didn't appear until I'd been on the drugs for a while.

Sometimes I wonder if living longer is worth the miserable side effects. After four years on these pills, my numbers look good but I feel worse than when I had 71 T-cells! I get pissed off when people say this is a manageable disease. Your article confirmed that I am not the only woman who feels this way.

Roseanne Crooker
Tamarac, Florida

Drug Healer

Thank you for including a credit for my booklet, "Positive About Drugs," in "Party Favors" (June 1998), and congratulations on a well-written, entertaining and succinct piece of journalism. The entire text of the booklet, along with some other articles on the recreational/HIV drugs mixing issue, can be read on the Internet at www.cluedup.demon.co.uk.

Glen Monks
Via the Internet

I loved "Party Favors." There is too little available information about interactions between protease inhibitors and recreational drugs. Thank you for publishing it and please revisit this topic. And keep up the pressure to get access to sterile syringes.

Mona Bennett
Atlanta Harm
Reduction Coalition

Atlanta

POZ Pros

I have to tell you how much I love your magazine. I read the Letters to the Editor and laugh at all the people who hate this, that and the other about POZ. I don't know what I'd do if POZ was discontinued or made unavailable to me. On countless occasions, it has been my source of information about new meds to discuss with my doctor. It's sad how some people still want their news and AIDS reporting sugarcoated. Until they sugarcoat my AZT, keep up the great work!

Thom Delahunt
Via the Internet

I am 20 years old and HIV negative but I read every page of every issue of your magazine to keep up with the constantly changing face of AIDS. I volunteer at my local AIDS CARE center and feel comfortable talking with people with HIV—and this comfort stems from the knowledge I obtain from the contents of POZ.

Jeff W. Carter
Chattanooga, Tennessee

I am on my third day of ritonavir at full dose, and life is somewhat sucky right now. So I decided it was time to give you kudos for the remarkable magazine that I receive gratis. I continue to be inspired and amazed at what a spectacular piece of lit you produce. Photos are always of the highest quality and articles are concise and comprehendible. Keep it up. Godspeed Scott O'Hara.

Kevin Phelps
Bloomington, Indiana

I am HIV positive and serving a 15-year prison term. POZ has been my awakening in learning about my disease from a medical point of view. I find it sad that my HIV positive peers and I have limited information and assistance when trying to access the prison medical department. Reading your well-informed medical updates and articles about PWAs who are doing well motivates me and encourage my determination to live well.

Your magazine is a gift to PWAs, so keep the presses rolling. We love POZ at Chowchilla Prison!

Beverly Henry
Central California
Women's Facility
Chowchilla, California

POZ Cons

For several issues now, I have been nauseated by the bareback sex “discussions” you have been printing.

I have never seen such pathetic individuals—all “victims” moaning about how hard safer sex is to manage, how everyone is out to ruin their fun. Promiscuous sex is neither a civil right nor an act of political courage; it’s simply a great way for fucked-up, self-destructive individuals to ensure that the gay community continues to slide into oblivion. But to pretend that it’s every man for himself and that we have no moral responsibility for infecting others is truly a low point in humanity. Can any of these sociopaths actually look me in the eye and tell me that their orgasm is worth more than another person’s life?

Brian Hickman
Long Beach, California

What I don’t like about POZ are the articles about people who have stopped taking their medications and say they are doing fine. I believe you are giving the wrong impression and might influence others to do the same. Until there’s a cure, we have got to continue to take our medications.

Marshall Fine
Metuchen, New Jersey

As the World Learns

A brief note to let you know you have readers in New Zealand. I’ve been living with the virus for more than 12 years, and am an HIV-information junkie, so I appreciate the info I glean from you. However, I do wish you’d cover more international issues. There is a whole world out there.

We have many of the same issues here, such as treatment accessibility, adherence, barebacking, discrimination and safe-sex fatigue. But in the United States, you are better placed to get access to more treatments. We have to fight tooth and nail for any changes, and as we’re such a small market, drug companies aren’t all that interested in running trials down here.

We’ve been fairly successful in areas of prevention, thanks to the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. We are able to talk about things a lot more openly than appears to be the case in America: We’ve had needle exchanges for years, homosexuality is completely legal, and schoolkids are told about sex.

Michael Stevens
Via the Internet

A Criminal Mind

I found what some of the individuals said in the article “From Unsafe to Illegal”— Ron Bayer in

particular—to be frightening (May 1998). In fact, all, except for Uffe Gartner, seemed to be locked into their own little fears and microcosms revolving within the HIV machine.

I suppose Dennis deLeon would have me declare publicly, just because I'm a PWA, that unsafe sex is "immoral." If there hadn't been unsafe sex, none of us would have been born. The ones who are really immoral are those PWAs who, out of their jealousy of freedom of choice, decide for others what they should and should not do. They can take their judgmental, blaming attitudes and politics back into the closet. I've come too far in forgiving those whom I misguidedly blamed for my own viral situation to pull myself back into the shadows of fear, intimidation and blame.

If people want to make laws concerning prevention, they must come to a common understanding of what would actually prevent the spread of this virus. It's not to be found in some law that criminalizes, separates and isolates the person with HIV, but in needle exchange, education and unconditional support.

James Taylor
Santa Monica, California

Correction: *The chapter headings for the two excerpts from Larry Kramer's novel-in-progress, The American People, published in POZ's August 1998 fiction issue, were inadvertently left out. The first excerpt is titled "Israel and Grace," and the second is titled "Francis Is Dead on My Floor." POZ apologizes for any confusion this mistake may have caused.*

Letters to the editor should be sent with the writer's name, address and daytime phone number to: The Editor, POZ, Box 1279, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10113-1279; or e-mail: letters@poz.com. Published letters may be edited for length and clarity and cannot be returned.

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