On the Road to DC

November 21, 2011 By Regan Hofmann

This World AIDS Day, it is time to rethink everything you thought about HIV. “Game-changing,” “history-making” and “revolutionary” are just some of the phrases we’re hearing a lot, from lots of people, about what’s happening in the world of AIDS today.

Groundbreaking results from scientific studies have radically altered the way we see treatment. Because treatment is *also* prevention, the conversation focused on how we can get more drugs to more people in more countries (including the United States) more affordably. UNAIDS revised the “universal access” goal to 15 million people by 2015. The race to save lives while stopping viral spread is on.

Also this year, a man named Timothy Brown was publicly declared cured of HIV. His cure likely won’t be replicated, but it accelerated research big time. In response, two international consortiums are working to tear down barriers to finding the cure. There also were major leaps forward in vaccine development.

All these things spurred a worldwide discussion around an incredible notion: the end of AIDS. Global health experts claimed, in chorus, that our generation has the tools to stop the spread of HIV forever.

That’s the good news. The bad news is, as we go to press, Congress is cutting trillions of dollars from the federal budget. The cuts are likely to negatively affect domestic and global AIDS relief. This will cause us to lose the precious ground we’ve gained, and it will result in unnecessary death, new infections and more children being orphaned. It is financially irresponsible and foolish to cut budgets now. Thirty years of investment in AIDS are just starting to pay off. Strong leadership and renewed advocacy are needed if we are to end this epidemic.

It takes courage and vision to believe in something others say can’t be done. And it takes a special kind of person to publicly fight for unpopular causes. Dame Elizabeth Taylor, who passed away this March, embodied all those things. She unflinchingly used her great beauty to capture the spotlight and then, standing in it, spoke words that inspired people to help us and shamed those who turned their backs on us. She was one of the first and greatest AIDS warriors; her generosity extends post-mortem: A portion of the proceeds from a Christie’s auction this December of her spectacular jewels will be donated to her AIDS foundation.

Regan Hofmann

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

With Taylor’s passing, an era ends. It’s now time for those of us who remain to continue where the likes of Taylor left off. Enter the POZ 100. These people, things and ideas serve as inspiration and guides for how we go forward, together.

With the International AIDS Conference coming to Washington, DC, next July, we have a unique moment to leverage our collective power to convince the world at large that we can and must wipe AIDS off the face of the earth.

Which is why POZ is proud to announce the Road to Washington—a new initiative to galvanize advocacy efforts on HIV/AIDS.

I hope all of you have a peaceful, happy and healthy holiday season. But rest up. While 2011 was a big year, baby, you ain’t seen nothing yet!

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