From a Distance

Our cover story is on what we need to know about COVID-19 and HIV. Also, “Rest in power” to the late AIDS activist Larry Kramer.

June 29, 2020 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

It has become quite clear that the new coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, are both here to stay for the foreseeable future. In the United States, over 2 million people have had the coronavirus and over 100,000 Americans have died of COVID-19.

However, when it comes to people living with HIV and how COVID-19 affects us, things become less clear. That’s not to say we know nothing. Experts tell us that we are not at any greater risk for COVID-19 than others if we have undetectable HIV and have none of the underlying conditions known to increase the risk of serious illness resulting from the new coronavirus.

Although that is good news, it doesn’t give us the whole picture. Why are so many of us living with HIV seemingly doing well when we get COVID-19? Do the drugs we take to fight HIV give us an advantage against the new coronavirus? What about those of us who have detectable HIV?

In an attempt to answer those questions and more, we dedicated our cover story to understanding what we all need to know about COVID-19 and HIV. Click here to read how folks with HIV are coping.

The fact that many folks with HIV have had only mild to moderate illness resulting from COVID-19 should not obscure the truth that others with HIV have died of the new coronavirus. In remembrance, we spotlight seven HIV heroes lost to COVID-19—some had HIV themselves, and others did not. Click here for more.

HIV groups across the country have had to adapt to the new normal of living with COVID-19. Examples include altering how they deliver services and providing additional mental health support. Click here for more examples, including how to get a face mask that promotes the Undetectable Equals Untransmittable message.

There is a broad consensus that a vaccine against the new coronavirus is the holy grail for ending the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that hope, those of us in the HIV community know that, after nearly 40 years of AIDS, we are still without a vaccine against the retrovirus. So how realistic is a coronavirus vaccine?

The nonprofit group AVAC, which focuses on global advocacy for HIV prevention, set out to explore that question and more in a webinar series about COVID-19 and HIV. Click here to read an edited transcript from one of the webinars on how lessons from pandemic vaccine development can help fight COVID-19.

HIV can be sexually transmitted, while the virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through the air. However, both viruses can be prevented via contact tracing, a process that identifies people who may have been exposed. A new prevention strategy called molecular surveillance goes a step further. Click here to read about the pros and cons.

The new coronavirus has even forced conferences such as AIDS 2020 and HIV2020 to go virtual. Click here to read more.

Last but certainly not least, we want to celebrate the life of the late AIDS activist Larry Kramer, who died as we closed this issue. Stay tuned for much more in our September issue, but for now, I'll just say, "Rest in power."

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