Editor’s Letter

Pretty Is as Pretty Does

April 1, 2010 By Regan Hofmann

There is a saying from an old parable: From everyone to whom much is given, much will be required. It’s a thought that Stefanía Fernández, the current reigning Miss Universe, abides. As one of the most beautiful women in the world operating from a highly visible, global platform, she has a unique ability to capture people’s attention. And when she does, she asks them to think constructively about HIV and AIDS.

Rather than using her exquisite face to sell shoes or perfume, she uses it to spread awareness and education about HIV as an AIDS ambassador, educator and role model (she’s been publicly tested for HIV). Though all who wear the Miss Universe crown are asked to battle the beast of HIV (it has been the official social cause of the pageant since 1996), Fernández had a history of helping people with HIV before being crowned. And in “The Education of Miss Universe,” she shares her plans to continue doing so after she removes her sparkling mantle.

We know HIV/AIDS can, and does, affect all kinds of people around the world. But we also know it disproportionately affects African-American and Latino people in the United States. While African Americans comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population, they account for about 51 percent of new HIV infections. And while Hispanics account for 12 percent of the population, they represent an estimated 17 percent of new HIV infections stateside.

Which is why the spotlight must be focused white hot on new HIV infections among Latino and African-American people. So we can prevent future infections through heightened awareness and better education and counseling and help people discover their status and link them to care and support quickly. And sometimes a pretty face is what’s needed to get people’s attention.

The other extraordinarily pretty face gracing our pages this month is Caressa Cameron, the newly crowned Miss America. (It’s the pageant issue!) As an African American, she says it is especially appropriate that she also use her platform and glamour quotient to reinvigorate the conversation about HIV.

There’s something wonderfully ironic about the notion of these two beauties speaking about AIDS. To hear messages about the necessity for safer sex come from such sexy women may be especially effective in an era when there is much desire to separate the thought of diseases from

the sexual realm.

Some argue the reason prevention efforts fail is because sex inherently celebrates abandonment while safe sex requires restriction and responsibility. But I argue that safer sex is sexier sex. Because if you can be open and honest and clear about what risks you face and how you and your partner want to handle them, then you can experience the true freedom of knowing that you're letting go without risking harm.

I hope everyone who looks upon these lovely women is able to hear their messages through the hormone haze that can occur when Stefanía or Caressa enters a room. Because what makes them truly beautiful is not how they present their God-given gifts of good looks but rather, how they wield them to help people living with HIV.

In another timeless parable, beauty tamed the beast. May it be so again.

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