



Facing the Facts

Knowing that HIV was a manageable chronic disease helped Kesy Pillay-Höss with his own diagnosis.

August 9, 2021 By Kesy Pillay-Höss

I'm a 45-year-old gay male nurse and HIV counselor. For many years, I have worked with people who are sick and counseled people living with HIV.

In March 2019, I had a one-night stand with someone I knew and trusted. I never thought anything of it; I never got sick or anything of that sort.

On August 1, I wanted to take out another life insurance policy and was informed by the insurance company that my body was producing a lot of antigens. Being a nurse, I knew it meant that I was likely HIV positive.

To be honest, I never got depressed or anything of that sort, I was just so strong. I immediately informed my family who took the news very badly—as though I was going to die the next day.

I had to sit them down to explain and reassure them that I am not dying or going to die anytime soon, and that HIV is a manageable chronic disease.

On August 5, I went into the hospital for a second test and to be put on antiretrovirals. I knew people who had bad side effects from the meds, but I wasn't really worried. I just thought, Shit happens; I will deal with it.

I started taking Odimune, the South African [generic] version of Atripla, as well as Pyridoxine [vitamin B-6] and Isoniazid [an antibiotic] for the prevention of tuberculosis.

I didn't get any side effects and am taking my meds on time every day and leading a normal life.

I have no animosity or anger toward the person who gave me HIV. I don't blame anyone, not even myself. I guess life is as such. What to do? Just hope for the best.

What three adjectives best describe you?

Cool, calm, collected.

What is your greatest achievement?

Traveling the world, buying my house with cash.

What is your greatest regret?

I have no regrets. I have lived a full, successful life.

What keeps you up at night?

Hehehe, movies.

What is the best advice you ever received?

Be strong.

What person in the HIV/AIDS community do you most admire?

Nkosi Johnson.

What drives you to do what you do?

Determination and will power.

What is your motto?

“Live your life, no matter what.”

If you had to evacuate your house immediately, what is the one thing you would grab on the way out?

My wallet.

If you could be any animal, what would you be?

A bird.