



Heart of Gold

This special issue, which highlights the latest in HIV treatment, takes a closer look at clinical trials.

June 24, 2024 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I recently switched HIV medications. My doctor had been suggesting I make this change for a while now. I was reluctant to do so due to my adherence to the “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” perspective. Over the years, that way of thinking has mostly served my health well.

Although nothing was technically “broke,” certain considerations finally surfaced that convinced me to switch. As another saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Maintaining my undetectable viral load while also possibly staving off the potential for a problematic side effect was an irresistible combination.

I’m grateful to be living in a time when the choices for effective HIV treatment are manifold. I’m also humbled to have the privilege of access to excellent health care. The result is that making this switch has been, frankly speaking, boring. That said, I prefer uneventful to the hand-wringing that so many of us once faced.

Much of the credit for our current treatment choices goes to the countless people who’ve participated in clinical trials. Without such studies, we would literally have no effective HIV treatments, let alone improvements in such medications. Researchers and pharmaceutical companies usually get the spotlight, so kudos to trial participants.

This special issue, which highlights the latest in HIV treatment, takes a closer look at clinical trials. Alicia Diggs, our cover subject, is a great example of the link between people living with HIV and clinical trials. She’s a long-term survivor working toward a PhD in public health education. [Go here](#) to read about her advocacy.

Most recently, Diggs participated in the REPRIEVE trial, which tested statin use for people living with HIV who are at low to moderate risk for cardiovascular disease, a group that wouldn’t usually be prescribed statins. The results led the Department of Health and Human Services to

recommend statin use by this group, a major change.

That's just one of the latest outcomes from related clinical trials. [Go here](#) to read how studies of new treatments, prevention methods and comorbidity management are key to improving quality of life for people living with HIV or at risk for the virus.

One of the most consequential results from recent HIV-related clinical trials is the confirmation of the Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U) message. Alison Rodger, a physician and a researcher, led the study that put the argument to rest—people living with HIV on effective treatment do not transmit the virus via sex. [Go here](#) for more.

The holy grail of HIV research remains finding a widely applicable cure. A handful of folks have been cured, but the process is too risky and costly to be practical. Nonetheless, the people who are now living virus-free are an inspiration to the rest of us hoping for our own cure. [Go here](#) to read our Q & A with Paul Edmonds, one of the few who are cured.

For the latest roster of HIV medications, [go here](#) for our annual quick-reference chart comparing current options.