Let’s Stay Together

February 19, 2013 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I had my first EKG at my most recent visit to the doctor. I was told that “at your age” (I’m 42) it was just a good thing to do to get a baseline for the future. They were right, of course. Some HIV meds, and perhaps HIV itself, contribute to cardiovascular disease. Add on the risk factors everyone faces, and heart health is important for those of us with HIV.

If it weren’t for being connected to care, I don’t think that EKG would’ve happened. It’s that connection that keeps me healthy—and I’m grateful for having the health care that makes it possible.

Too many people with HIV/AIDS in the United States are not connected to care. The reasons vary, but they all lead to the same sad result—only a small percentage of HIV-positive people in this country are virally suppressed, which is the ultimate goal of treatment.

Monica Johnson, Donald Head and Lisa Mendez all struggled successfully to get and stay linked to care. Go to page 30 to read how they avoided falling through the cracks and how a collective approach that includes patients, providers and advocates working together can start to repair health care for people with HIV/AIDS nationwide.

GMHC in New York City does a great job of getting people connected to care and helping them stay that way—and, after 30 years of service to all people with HIV/AIDS, the organization keeps striving for improvement. Go to page 10 to read our Q&A with Marjorie J. Hill, PhD, executive director of GMHC. Two years after moving into their new location, she shares that relocation fears from GMHC clients have been replaced by reinvigorated hopes.

Making such hopes a reality this year will determine if and how fast we can truly begin to achieve the end of AIDS. So argues Mitchell Warren, executive director of AVAC, a global advocacy group for biomedical HIV prevention. Go to page 36 to read his outline of five priorities for action in 2013 to keep us on track.

Advocates will disagree on what actions really need to be taken. However, closing the health care gaps for people with HIV/AIDS should be something we can all agree on.

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