Letters—January/February 2013

December 19, 2012

The Importance of Self-Worth
In his blog entry "Turning Positive" (October 18, 2012) Aundaray Guess writes about how his low self-esteem played a key role in his becoming HIV positive.

Thank you for sharing your truth. Your bravery is a testament to your found self-worth.

David Aldridge

It is a shame that we have to experience these testaments to find out who we really are. My HIV doesn't make me. Regardless of how it was obtained, the fact still remains, I am "stained." Yet, I look at [HIV] as a "gift of life" rather than death, because before HIV, I was dying—mentally, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically. Now, I live!

Luis Demetria Mallard

Lack of self-esteem is a true demon—one that drives so many of my younger black brethren to live life on the edge. So much has happened to my young black brethren and those of us who have aged out of innocence by virtue of the revelation of our HIV-positive status.

Robert T. Jenkins

Northern Disclosure
"Controversial Canadian Supreme Court Ruling on HIV Disclosure" (October 5, 2012) discusses the latest ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada that states people living with HIV are open to criminal prosecution for not disclosing their status before intercourse unless they wear a condom and have a low viral load.

The onus should not be on the HIV-positive person to tell their partner to use protection. Nor should an HIV-positive person be forced to disclose. There are men out there that bareback and do not practice safer sex. So why should I or any other positive man be responsible for an adult that refuses to be responsible and use condoms?

Andy, Toronto

Disclosure is a moral issue; it should not be punishable by a lengthy prison sentence. The issue is one of risk. Both sex partners have a mutual responsibility to practice safe sex. If people prefer to be unsafe, and have multiple random partners, they can't expect the court to offer them safety.

Ting, Oshawa, Ontario

I had tears of joy as I read the headlines for this news story in my local paper. When I read the full report, however, that short-lived joy turned to rage. Canada had a more lenient definition of "significant risk" back in 1998 when such an assessment was before the courts. I encourage [everyone], including the media, to follow the statement and news release of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network for a clear understanding of this terrible injustice.

Serodiscord, Montreal, Canada

Condoms can break during passionate sex. It's only fair that sexually active people disclose before engaging in sexual activity that can transmit HIV. Many HIV-positive people seek out partners who are positive in order not to infect negative people. There is no shame in being positive, but rules of conduct should apply.

Mark, New York

Standing Up to Stigma
In his blog entry "Coming Out Again and Again" (October 11, 2012) POZ editor-in-chief Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr. writes about the difference between coming out as gay and coming out as HIV positive—and the importance of doing both.

I am not completely open with everyone about my status, but I am getting more comfortable. I do agree that the stigma can be overcome as long as those of us who can disclose we have HIV continue to do so!

Mark

My 24-year-old son was diagnosed HIV positive about a year ago. While he's very open with others about his status, I fear for the responses and ramifications he'll face on the job, socially and in other venues. Despite the fact that the [negative] responses are ignorant and the ramifications are unjustified, I can't help but be concerned for his well-being. My motherly concern kicks in and supersedes his implied social and political obligations. Am I wrong?

Karemiah

I have faced some backlash as a black man in a small town in the South, because I have revealed my HIV status to people. However, I think that by revealing my status, I am removing some of the stigma associated with AIDS.

Andy

Nervous About Nerve Damage
In the article "Atripla, Sustiva Component Linked to Neuron Damage" (September 28, 2012) research shows that a byproduct formed during the breakdown of efavirenz (found in Sustiva and Atripla) appears to damage nerve cells. Scientists say this may contribute to cognitive impairment in people living with HIV but more research is necessary.

I've been on Atripla for five or six years, during which time I've also suffered from some side effects. I've considered changing the regimen, but what's the alternative? Switching to another medication that can also have as-yet-undetermined side effects? I'm disappointed to read about the unproven nerve damage, but none of these HIV meds have been tested long-term, and these are all very strong drugs.

Joe D., Berlin, Germany

I've been on Atripla for four years. What a godsend! My viral load is undetectable, my CD4s are great, and I take one pill a day. I don't experience the side effects, and I guess I feel blessed that is the case. If something can be done to mitigate the possibility of side effects, great, but don't remove a drug from the market when it does what it is prescribed to do and severe side effects are rare.

Justin, Seattle

I have taken Atripla for the past five or six years and still suffer from some of the same side effects I had when I started taking the meds, like a buzz feeling as if I'm high on drugs, hot flashes and bad nightmares. I forget things and have difficulty understanding certain things. After reading this article, I wonder if I should change my meds.

RC, New York

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