Letters—July/August 2014

June 25, 2014

Diabetes vs. HIV
In a POZ Forums thread titled "I'd rather have HIV than diabetes" (April 16, 2014), forums member Delby posted a link to an article in The Spectator written by a London-based doctor who claimed that he would rather have diabetes than HIV.

I've said [I'd prefer HIV, but I was] diagnosed with HIV in 2003. [If I were diagnosed pre-1996, when lifesaving meds came out], however, I would not have said it. Watching friends and children diagnosed with diabetes caused me to consider HIV a lesser of disease evils. Thank you for posting this.

Emeraldize

Keep in mind that when a medical doctor makes such a statement it's parochial in the sense of clinical treatment, discounting the mental health aspects and stigma of each disease. Have you ever heard of someone's family forcing a diabetic patient to eat off paper plates and disposable plastic forks when visiting their home?

I still hear such stories in support groups for people with HIV, even in 2014. It is true that with some people and type 2 diabetes, there is a "blame the victim" mind-set, but I can't imagine it approaches the level of HIV stigma, which affects intimate relationships because it is sexually transmissible. The bottom line is, I don't think doctors making statements like that are helping anyone. It's like the "HIV is manageable" statement. Sure, it's manageable for most people, but it's still wildly not so for others.

Miss Philicia

I've never known diabetes to be criminalized the same way HIV is. I've never read a personals advert saying "diabetes negative UB2." Having HIV strongly influences when and what I eat, my exercise and sleep regimes, disclosure issues mandated by law, neuropathy, extra work mediating depression, extra monitoring for non-AIDS-defining cancers and so forth. I'm not saying diabetes is simple, but HIV is not as simple as taking a pill. Just because we've become accustomed to the routine doesn't mean that it is a walk in the park.

Harleymc

Undetectable and Proud
In his op-ed "'Undetectable' Is the New 'Negative'?" (March 11, 2014), David Duran wrote about being proud of his undetectable viral load, especially after recent results from the ongoing PARTNER study showed that no transmission took place between couples in which the HIV-positive partner had an undetectable viral load.

Great story! I have been undetectable with awesome labs for over six years and decided to proclaim this on the few dating sites I visit. Unfortunately, not one person has ever written to me since, even though my profile has been perused hundreds of times. It's unfortunate that such stigma still exists.

Robert, Columbus

I've been undetectable for almost a year now, and it's been a rough ride. The thought of being close to someone is scary. I would be horrified if someone had to go through what I've had to. I wish people would realize that we could still infect others; it's not a cure even if you're undetectable.

Tony

Knowingly risking someone else's health is irresponsible. Being positive myself, I know the anguish, stress and pain it causes. Yes, being undetectable is good, but not allowing your partners to make an informed decision is selfish beyond belief.

TommieJ

If the country really wants to eradicate HIV, the laws need to change. The criminalization of HIV needs to change. If a person is undetectable and uses condoms, then there should not be any disclosure requirement. The disclosure requirement to state governments also needs to end. People don't get tested because they don't want government snoops looking over their shoulders. For every positive and proud person, there are 1,000 positive and scared people who are afraid to get tested. This is a policy problem.

Steve

Is "undetectable" the new "straight-acting"? And by that, I mean another way to cleave off big chunks of the gay community, saying, "I'm not like those other guys who are fat, femme or experiencing a viral blip." I've been rejected because of HIV, and even though I'm an adult, it can

still hurt when you get dissed by the cool kids. My labs may be undetectable, but I don't want to date someone who turns some number into a deal breaker.

Michael Buitron, Long Beach

Novel Romance
In "Dangerous Writing" (March/April 2014), POZ editor-in-chief Oriol R. Guiterrez Jr. interviewed renowned author Tom Spanbauer about his latest novel, I Love You More, which is about HIV/AIDS, aging with the virus and falling in love.

I am turning 65 in May. I have been HIV positive since the '80s and feel amazing. I cry a lot because I am so grateful to be turning 65 and to be sober and pretty happy. Most people don't get why this is such a big deal. I have straight and gay friends, but they are all considerably younger so they weren't in New York City in the '80s. The author and I were. We are kindred spirits and survivors. I will get the book because I am sure I will know what he is talking about.

Lester Patterson, New York City

I love that Tom is writing about gay men of a certain age, and especially through the prism of living with HIV.

Mark S. King, Washington, DC

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