Putin Reportedly Recruits Prisoners With HIV and Hepatitis for Ukraine War

Meanwhile, to avoid the draft, Russian men resort to breaking their own arms and legs or bribing doctors for fake HIV diagnoses.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin is allegedly so desperate to enlist Russians in his war against Ukraine that he has recruited prisoners living with infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C, reports Newsweek. Reportedly, the drafted prisoners must wear color-coded bracelets to differentiate them from other soldiers—for example, white bands for hepatitis C and red bands for HIV.

This news arrives as other media outlets, including Forbes, report that Russian men are resorting to drastic measures to dodge the draft, including breaking their own arms and legs (and posting gruesome videos online) and purchasing fake diagnoses for HIV and hepatitis C. Falsified documents for an HIV diagnosis cost $620 and those for hepatitis cost $820, payable in Bitcoin, according to global tech site Rest of World. Of course, considering that prisoners living with these viruses are allegedly being deployed to the battlefield, one wonders whether an HIV diagnosis will continue to be a get-out-of-war card for non-incarcerated Russians.

Putin announced a partial mobilization of reserves on September 21, summoning over 300,000 male citizens to the war effort. This caused a mass exodus of Russians—an estimated 400,000, according to Bloomberg. In many cases, they're fleeing neighboring countries and the European Union. The Ministry of Georgia, for example, registered nearly 70,000 Russians, reports Yahoo News.

In the United States, people living with HIV and hepatitis C are not allowed to enlist in the military; last month Congress members pressured the Biden administration and the Department of Defense to allow those with HIV and hep C to join the military. In addition, a federal judge this spring struck down Pentagon policies that discharged and denied promotions to service members who contracted HIV. For more on that, see "'Landmark Victory' Court Ruling for Service Members Living With HIV."

"The court ruled that the Pentagon's policies regarding service members with HIV are not only outdated but unlawful, arbitrary and capricious and unconstitutional," said Lambda Legal's Scott Schoettes, JD, about that ruling. "Recognizing that appropriately managed HIV is a chronic

condition with little to no effect on a person's overall health or daily activities and that merely being HIV positive is no impediment to safely deploying and performing as a member of the U.S. military, the court has issued one of the strongest judicial rulings in over two decades for people living with HIV."

HIV can be treated, and folks with an undetectable viral load not only live longer and healthier lives, but they also do not transmit HIV through sex. Unlike HIV, hepatitis C can be cured, often with daily tablets taken for a few weeks.

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. When untreated, it can lead to scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), liver cancer, the need for a liver transplant and death. Hepatitis can be caused by several factors, including toxins, excess alcohol use, autoimmune diseases, fat in the liver and viruses, including the three most common ones: hepatitis A, B and C. According to "Hepatitis C Transmission and Risk," part of Hep's Basics of Hepatitis, hep C is most easily spread through:

- Sharing needles and other equipment (paraphernalia) used to inject drugs;
- Blood transfusions and organ transplants before July 1992;
- Sexual contact with someone who has hep C;
- Having a mother who had hep C when you were born.

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others. For more, see the Basics of HIV/AIDS in POZ.com, a sister publication of HepMag.com, RealHealthMag.com, CancerHealth.com and TuSaludMag.com.

For HIV-related news on Russia and Ukraine, see "UPDATE: U.S. Provides $13M in HIV and Services to Ukraine," "#WeStandWithUkraine and HIV-Affected Ukrainians" and "How the Soviets Claimed the U.S. Created AIDS, and Who Believed It."

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