I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For

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I have always believed that HIV would someday be cured. I just never thought it would take this long. My belief that science can achieve what it sets out to do if given the time and resources has been tested.

That said, I have more hope than ever for an HIV cure that will end the epidemic. Much of that excitement comes from the fact that we’ve already seen a cure.

The late Timothy Ray Brown, aka the Berlin Patient, was the first confirmed case. He fought leukemia with a bone marrow transplant that also happened to have a genetic mutation that prevented HIV from entering cells. He died of a recurrence of his cancer, but he remained free of HIV.

POZ recently spotlighted the second person confirmed to be cured, Adam Castillejo, aka the London Patient. He was cured of HIV by the same procedure. But as Adam knows all too well, his example, while inspiring, will benefit only a few. The costs and the risks make it impractical for most of us. That’s precisely why he is advocating for a widely applicable cure.

There are a few more people who may be cured of HIV, and in time, others from ongoing studies will probably be considered cured. The path to the magic bullet is still unknown. In fact, there may be not one but many paths. There is real hope.

Case in point: Tom Perrault. Our cover subject was board chair of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. He went on treatment immediately after testing HIV positive in 2004, although at that time the benefits of starting treatment at diagnosis were still being debated. Today, it is standard procedure. Tom’s decision in 2004 is part of what made him eligible for the most complex cure trial to date.

The goal of the trial is to stimulate the immune system of people living with HIV so that they can control the virus without medication, what’s often referred to as a functional cure. HIV still resides in your body, but it doesn’t harm you and you can’t transmit the virus. I would take that if I could. Go here to find out more about Tom’s story.

One of the most prominent cure researchers is Steven Deeks, MD, the principal investigator of the cure study that Tom is in. The trial is a joint collaboration between amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, and the University of California San Francisco, where Steven has spent 30 years studying HIV. Go here to read about his new challenge.

Until there's a widely applicable cure, we must continue the search for better HIV treatment and prevention. This special issue of POZ highlights the latest in the science behind those efforts. Go here to read about long-acting antiretrovirals and long-term remission.

One of the recent barriers to making progress in the HIV epidemic has been COVID-19. José M. Zuniga, PhD, MPH, believes we need to refocus. Go here to read our Q&A with the president and CEO of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care.

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