Wonder Women

Choose your own adventure in HIV education!

February 10, 2014 By Trent Straube

When 64-year-old Ann decides to try online dating, she finds both romance and one-night stands on the menu, along with checkups for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Meanwhile, when the two-years clean and sober Beth attends a convention, she has the unexpected opportunity to party. What choices will these and two other women make? You, the reader, can decide in Jacki Gethner's Behind Door #3: Choose With Your Eyes Wide Open, an engaging choose-your-own-adventure book that's as fun as it is educational.

Gethner, an HIV-negative certified drug and alcohol counselor and massage therapist, gears Door #3 for "women of a certain age" (50 and older), which is also the name of a program she co-founded with Sally Fisher, an AIDS activist, and Sharon Lund, PhD, who has been living with HIV for three decades.

Women of a certain age share many of the same risk factors as younger Americans, with some added challenges. For example, they might be unaware of their partners' risk factors. And, Gethner says, "a large number of physicians are young enough to be children of these women, and they are less willing to ask [about sexual health] because of transference with their moms—'I can't ask her that!'" Then there's the simple fact that unprotected vaginal sex is riskier for the woman than the man, in part, as you'll learn in Door #3, because semen can stay in the vagina for days after sex, which means longer exposure to HIV.

People 55 and older accounted for 19 percent of the 1.1 million Americans living with the virus in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and they're more likely than younger Americans to be diagnosed later in the course of the disease.

"Older women have not learned these things and generally do not use social media to obtain this info," Gethner says, adding that "one in three grandmothers is a primary care provider—we cannot afford to get sick and have those kids affected by that."

***

Reading Liza Zvezda's memoir Somewhere Under The Rainbow…, you can't help but wish she had been armed with the wisdom of Behind Door #3. When Zvezda fell in love as a teen, she dropped out of school

and got married (and pregnant); when her husband started shooting up, she followed suit—and so did HIV. But by the book's end, Zvezda is a 48-year-old grandmother who is sober and educated about the virus. ("Changing doctors was probably one of the most important things I did," she recalls.) Along the way, she mended relationships with her family and became an HIV advocate. Zvezda recounts her story in unflinching candor and remains a woman to root for.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/wonder-women-planet-25155-5821