10 Simple Ways to Fight HIV Every Day

March 13, 2018 By Martha Warriner Jarrett

My apologies for using a headline that's already been used by POZ, but for me, it provides a list of the things I've already done, the things I'm working on, and the things I'd like to do. If only I could do them all.

When I was first diagnosed with HIV a few years back, all I wanted to do was pull the blanket over my head and pretend that it wasn't true. Fortunately, that phase only lasted a few months. After that, I began to realize that there was work to be done. Work that I could do. Because my demographic is a little unique (70-year-old heterosexual woman who'd never engaged in risky behavior), I set out to reach people who, like me, had no reason to suspect they might be HIV positive, along with the doctors who aren't testing those people because they're not in a high-risk group, and to make sure they get tested. Here's the results I've achieved, along with the work that I still have to do:

1. Get Political

Although I often get distracted by the politics of the day, I speak out on HIV/AIDS every chance I get. They say that all politics is local, so my activism is usually limited to local events. I've had articles in the local paper and been interviewed on local TV twice. I'd like to find a way to better influence policy makers, particularly on issues like drug prices.

2. Know Your Rights

I'm a retired lawyer and I own a home, so I'm not particularly concerned with employment or housing, but there's certainly more I could be doing to help others facing that kind of discrimination.

3. Reach Out

This is the area where I've been the most active. I work with the local health department planning events for things like National Testing Day and World AIDS Day, and with Planned Parenthood in their outreach and education efforts.

4. Be a Mentor

Again, an area where I could be doing more.

5. Raise Money

I've donated to our local AIDS foundation, as well as to AIDS Project Los Angeles (I lived in LA before I was diagnosed and have been donating to APLA for years). I've also donated to Planned

Parenthood for years, even before they were so supportive of me after I tested positive. If you think they're just about abortion and other women's health issues, think again. They're also very active in the field of STD testing and treatment, and our local office has some very good counselors.

6. Speak Up

Not only do I speak up whenever I can, I've written a book about my experiences with HIV/AIDS. I've got my own blog and, obviously, I blog for POZ. Everyone in my life knows I'm HIV positive and I've been instrumental in a lot of people I know getting tested. Fortunately, they're all negative.

7. Shop Smarter

This one's on my to do list. I've got lots of red ribbons, and a tee shirt that talks about the need to get tested, but I'd like to at least buy a red ribbon pin.

8. Get Educated

This one is a must! And for me, it was a necessity because I couldn't believe I'd been infected and I had no idea where it had come from. So I learned everything I could about this terrible disease. Then I used my research when I wrote my book. A Rough Season is not only my personal story, but a brief history of HIV/AIDS. At the end of the day, I realized that I must have acquired HIV from my late husband. I don't know where he got it and I really don't want to know, but it's been a heartbreaking experience.

9. Get Tested (or Take a Friend)

POZ says, "Knowing your HIV status, whether negative or positive, puts you in the best position to protect your health and the health of your sexual partners." I couldn't agree more. I just wish more doctors thought this way, particularly when their patients aren't among the groups where the disease is most common. I had no reason to suspect that I might be positive, and no doctor thought to test me. I nearly died because of what I now think of as my doctors' negligence. So I'm on a soapbox on this issue whenever and wherever I get the chance. Also, I make sure my negative husband gets tested—usually on National Testing Day.

10. Disclose Your Status

Again, I agree with POZ when it says, "Sharing your HIV status, whatever it is, isn't always easy, but doing so helps to normalize disclosure, which in turn fights stigma." So I do share it, but it certainly hasn't been easy.

Thanks, POZ, for giving us all this list of things we can and should be doing!

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