1,170,400

January 19, 2016 By Jay Squires

One of my obsessions has been the search for a record of my viral load on admission to the hospital in 2012, approximately ten years after I was infected. I feel this fact is needed to paint a picture of my condition when I wiped out.

The problem is that no one could give me the number. Three HIV specialists across two states were clueless, at least strictly speaking. My first team lead said he thought my level was 400-500,000 copies of the HIV virus. That's a frightening number and his estimate didn't satisfy me.

My research taught me about the progress of viral loads following infection. Shortly thereafter the victim passes into the "primary infection" stage of life with HIV. In this stage viral load will often soar to multimillion copy levels. After a short time viral levels recede to a fraction of that level. This is the number people with HIV work against when they begin antiretroviral therapy. The maximum expected value of that second figure is 1,000,000 copies.

My search continued and yesterday I spent focused time going through the book containing the record of my 2012 hospitalization. I wish I could tell you the sky opened and the heavenly choir sang but it was a quiet thing.

As my eyes scanned pages a large number stuck out and I had my answer. The number I saw was shocking, nearly beyond belief. It was far too high. My HIV viral load, February 23, 2012 was ***1,170,400***. Shit.

My first reaction was WTF? I'm not hauling wood for a cross but I have been through some tough times since discharge. Sometimes it felt like life itself was my enemy. In addition to that burden I've carried I was now living with a record breaking dose of HIV.

Today I reached out to my brain trust for an explanation. Since this is a medical issue I did not receive one but Dr. Bob did admit that is was "very unusual for someone's viral load to be over 1 million after being infected for years." So I'm unusual. It is no big surprise. My life since I got sick has been everything but usual. My historic VL is interesting but today should make little difference in the outcome. Maybe I can even spin it as a source of pride. Something like "Country boy whups huge HIV monster." Movie of the week?

It’s just another hill climbed.

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