6 Mistakes Most Newly HIV Diagnosed People Make

Or at least, the mistakes I made when I first learned of my status. But I bet many of you will relate.

August 4, 2017 By Aundaray Guess

Learning you're HIV positive is a new unwanted chapter in your life. For many it's a dark cloud that quickly hides the future you thought was waiting for you. For others, it's news that comes as no surprise based on their lifestyle, which brings forth the "time to get to work and do what I have to do mentality." I was in the first group as I seriously thought my life was over. I was just about to reach my twenties and upon hearing my diagnosis, just knew for a fact I would never see twenty-five. And the cloud I mentioned blanketed any future I envisioned for myself.

Yet, here I am, thirty years later, not only thriving but walking under clear skies. Of course it was no bed of roses as I had many lessons to learn, and I realize as I age there are new battles ahead. But reflecting on my early life with HIV and the previous challenges I had, I recognized the mistakes I made back then.

1. Not taking medication seriously

    When I was first diagnosed, I was prescribed various pills to help keep my virus at bay. Times have changed as regimen are much simpler. But even back then, although I was only prescribed three pills, I had no desire to be tied down to a pill. I didn't want a schedule I had to follow. I was young. Young people don't have schedules. And with an active lifestyle, I knew from the beginning it was going to be hard. But the lesson I soon learned is that no one ever said that having HIV was going to be a piece of cake. Yes there are some who have chosen to never take pills, but they are the rare exception. Often they realize they need the assistance of medication to maintain their health. And as a nurse once told me when I was complaining about my pills, "If something is going to help save your life, why bitch about it. Just do it." The rest is history as again I celebrate 30 years of being positive.

2. Not taking HIV medication on time

    When I gave in to a life with medication I didn't take it serious at all. I would take them whenever I either reminded myself or when I felt like it. Missed dosages were the norm. After all, I told myself, I will just take two dosages the next day. Which I have to add is bad math

and something no one should do. I learned later that missing your dosages was called taking a holiday, but I would go as far to say that I was on sabbatical. The bad news came for me when I learned I developed a resistance to my medication and found myself unable to take anything. With no new medication on the horizon, I started to watch as my T-cells (CD4s) started to go down and my viral load increased. Thankfully a new line of pills was approved and I re-started medication, this time on a strict schedule. So my lesson was, either take the pills or don't, but taking them on and off is a way your body will become resistance.

3. Keeping my HIV status secret

One of my earliest mistakes was believing I should keep my status secret and not share it with others. The reason I kept it quite was justifiable as many didn't know I was gay and there was so much stigma surrounding HIV. I knew if I revealed one then I had to reveal the other. And I simply wasn't ready to do that. My only option it seemed was to build a wall around myself that would keep me my secret safe. Silently I suffered, as I learned to live with this disease alone. It pained me when people asked why I looked so down and I couldn't share the reason why. I soon realize the wall I built to protect myself was now my prison. Sharing my status with a friend was the most opening day of my life. I not only received support but I also discovered the love of people who cared for me despite my status. In fact they loved me more because I felt enough about to them to share something so intimate. We sometimes anticipate reactions of others and perceive it's going to be negative, when it in fact it's the love we were always looking for.

4. Thinking I will never find a partner

One of the first things that ran through my head after learning my status was, "Who would want to be in a relationship with me now?" I mean, once anyone knew of my status there's no way they would want to build a life with me. This thinking led me into non-committal hook-ups often with people who to this day I couldn't tell you their names. My sex life was worthless, and I felt it was a reflection of me. My turning point was when I stopped looking for a relationship in others and started to develop a relationship with myself. It was the knowing of who I was and loving the person I was which allowed me to turn a corner. That self-love attracted others who wanted to love me as well despite my status. And it was this love that finds me my current relationship of 18 years. And yes he's negative.

5. Deciding to ignore my bills and obligations

Learning my status, I learned early that some don't care you have HIV. They simple don't. That includes the wonderful capitalist society we live in. You may have HIV but you still have bills to pay. You still have to buy groceries, pay rent/mortgage, utilities. And if you're behind on any payments, bill collectors especially don't care what your status is. It was a different picture for me as early on I damaged my credit. Why pay my bills when I wasn't going to be here? Why save for the future when I felt like I had no future? Why be financially responsible if I couldn't be sexually responsible? The lesson I learned is that although others may not care, I should

> fully embrace my life as I age with HIV. And as I age making sure I have a financial set future. So that means now is the time to make sure I take care of my obligations, even if others may not care about my status.

And my last mistake I made when newly diagnosed was:

6. Assuming that my dreams would die

> Guess what? My dreams are still alive, even if they don't seem possible. Life goes on, and as you accept your new chapter you'll quickly understand that although it may seem like your world is over, in a weird way it's just beginning. Having HIV gave me focus. It made me realize that although I was going to be on this earth for a while, tomorrow is never promised. So live. Live like you've never lived before. Take chance and push yourself. And most of all dare to dream. And dare to love. Starting with you.

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