Aging and HIV

March 10, 2011 By Aundaray Guess

As my 44th birthday arrives in two weeks there's blessings in saying that I'm here to celebrate my 44th. But also recognizing that as my age is slowly creeping up I let myself wonder what effect will this virus have on my body as it starts to lose its youthful vigor.

I know that at my age I'm not old, but in someways, lets face it I'm not the young chick I used to be. And one of my concerns is the long term affect of taking drugs that in my case have not been on the market for more than five years. I also say this knowing that my body has built up a resistance to some class of drugs and as of now my choices are limited until the next miracle pill arrives.
The issue of aging is funny. When we're young we want to be older and when we're older we want to be younger. And then there are those who never grow up and I'm saying it as a compliment. There used to be a time when I was at a younger age I would let everyone know it was my birthday. I would scream it from the mountain tops and made sure you placed it on your calender. Now I whisper it and am not as colorful in letting people know the day is coming.

My one concern is as I stated before is how will HIV affect me as I get older. I mean as we age regardless if we have HIV or not, we tend to develop other age illnesses such as arthritis, high blood pressure, menopause if you're a woman and the list goes on. And underneath this all is the foundation of HIV. Already my pill count is up to 13 pills a day which doesn't include just my meds. In that number we're also factoring in my Warfin, a blood thinner for a clot I developed in my right leg and also since my vitamin D levels are low, which is usually the case in African-Americans, which can lead to diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, the pills add up.

I wonder if my t-cells could talk if they would say to me, "Hey listen Dray, we've kept you healthy for forty-four years and twenty five of those years we called in extra troops to fight that HIV virus, but man we're getting tired and don't know how much longer we can do this. At least let us have a lunch break"

And as I'm contemplating their words, then my liver speaks up, "Yo man I know you need these pills to stay well but those meds are driving me crazy. I'm doing everything I can to keep you going but the everyday swallowing of all those pills are doing some serious damage to me. What's up?"

Yet we need those meds to keep going and unfortunately when other things appear we just have to stomach it and add those pills to our number count. I write this not to scare anyone and especially if you've recently been diagnosed and are starting meds, this is not to tell you to not take your meds. They do work. In my own space i just question how my life will look like as my body begins to age and I'm still fighting HIV.

If anything it should be a wake-up call to those who are not affected and think that they don't need to have safe sex, thinking that if they get HIV they can just take a pill and still look good while climbing

mountains. That may be some mentality today but will that mentality be the same in the next twenty to forty years when you're taking stuff that has no scientific summary of effect it's having on your system.

Yet I can't live in fear. Everyday we walk out the house is an unknown. All the worrying may be for nothing as I can get struck by a car while worrying about getting old. But the realities of living a life with HIV and aging is one that needs to be discussed as those who were infected early in the life of this disease are now affected by the question of current medication and its effect. I say this also recognizing those who are being infected who are already in their senior years as it's another growing population of people being infected and sometimes think they don't need to use protection.

Yet we all we're going to meet our maker and like they say it's how you live that dash that lays between the date you're born and the date you leave this earth. But I know that also this is the time to have honest conversations with my doctor and to hold nothing back and even if more pills are added, as a nurse told me a long time ago- if it's going to save your life, take them. and I've been fighting this long so it'll be crazy for me to give up now.

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