Blowing Up the HIV/AIDS Myth

It’s true that overall HIV rates are declining in our country, but progress has been uneven.

January 9, 2019 By Joyce Mitchell

“Remember that one day the AIDS crisis will be over.

And when that day has come and gone there will be people alive who will hear

that once there was a terrible disease, and that a brave group

of people stood up and fought and in some cases died

so others might live and be free.”

—Vito Russo ACT UP 1988

Seems some people have forgotten that HIV/AIDS is 100% preventable and that no one has to get HIV/AIDS today. New infections continue, especially among our youth. One in seven don’t know they’re infected. Not identified, tested and in treatment, they are at risk of passing along the virus to others. Gay/bisexual young people ages 13 to 24 account for nearly 70 percent of new HIV cases. These are our kids!

The numbers reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that among women and people ages 35 to 44, prevention efforts have dropped new infections by more than 30 percent this past decade. Yet, the twofold increase in young bisexual and gay men ages 13 to 24 means our youth are not getting the message.

While HIV/AIDS continues to affect youth, the myth persists that if you do test HIV positive then a simple pill will wipe away the problem. It does not. Treatment is imperative. No question. It preserves quality of life and prevents transmission of the virus. But it has side-effects. Who wants to depend on pills for the rest of their life?

Remembering the early years of the AIDS crisis remains painful for many of us who loved and lost. Faces are impossible to forget. Cara, the little two-year-old baby who died in the arms of her mother— as I watched. And Cheech. I was part of the constant stream of people paying my respects at his beside after the life had slipped from his soul.

We have tools in our toolbox today. Getting tested, knowing your status, and staying on treatment will help ensure a healthier life living with HIV/AIDS. For under-represented people, Ryan White

Funds are providing much-needed wrap-around services.

Annual HIV infections and diagnoses are overall declining in our country. The CDC credits this to targeted HIV prevention efforts. But the CDC acknowledges progress “has been uneven.” Our youth remain at-risk.

As a straight ally working to fight HIV/AIDS when I was a single mom, people would ask why I was involved. The answer was always the same. “I don’t want my son to grow up and contract HIV.”

It’s a myth that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is over. People who stood, fought and died—they are heroes. Their bravery will never be forgotten.

ACT UP!

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