Charlie Sheen: This Is What I Think!

November 17, 2015 By Rae Lewis-Thornton



When actor Charlie Sheen said, “I’m not living in that prison anymore” I felt that deep in my soul. It resonated loud and clear. I kept my own HIV infection a secret for seven years. For Real! My first seven years I only told 5 people that I had HIV, other than the men I dated. And even then I was afraid that someone would take my information and sabotage my life working at the national level as a young savvy political organizer. I can image that being blackmailed is crazy madness. So, yes I’m glad that Charlie Sheen made this decision to step outside of that madness and disclose his HIV status. I remember when I disclosed my HIV status, it felt like tons of bricks had been lifted off my shoulders...

Now, I’m not sure what my readers and supporters want me to say about all of this, but as usual, I’m going to speak the truth as I see it and know it to be.

1) It is a SHAME that in 2015, thirty four years, yes I said 34 years after the first documented HIV

cases by the Center for Disease Control that a person still lives in fear of disclosing their HIV status. **When are we going to stop shaming people who are living with HIV? Huh? WHEN?** Even now, everyone has a freaking opinion about what Charlie Sheen should have done with his life. HIS LIFE! I'm sadden, not just for Charlie, but for all the people who reach out to me daily via Social Media that are living with HIV and are afraid to disclose their HIV status for fear of judgement. I get it, just by watching the reaction to Charlie today.

This shamming has created a vicious cycle, especially when it comes to testing for HIV. Who even wants to know their status in this climate of judging and lack of compassion. Testing is critical, because 38% of those newly infected with HIV are infected by someone who does not know that they have HIV. So people don't great tested because of fear of judgement and they infect others unknowingly. Learning your HIV status late also means that treatment comes late. This is sad because studies, show the earlier you know the longer you live.

Furthermore, the fact the Matt Lauer even asked Charlie how he contracted HIV is some 34 year old "Good AIDS" "Bad AIDS" crap. First off, it ain't none of your freaking business how! Does knowing how change how you feel about him? If it does, shame on you. All it takes is one person, one time.

2. Charlie admits that he has had unprotected sex, but that his partner(s) knew that he was HIV positive and was also under his doctor's care. People seemed to be outraged by this fact, like they fucking Charlie. *Blank Stare* **The problem I see is not Charlie, but the mass majority have not caught up with the medical advancements around HIV.**

a) It is true that an HIV infected person with an Undetectable Viral load CANNOT infect another person with HIV. It does not matter, how many times they have unprotected sex, **you cannot transmit HIV when your Viral Load is Undetectable.**

b) Charlie said that his partner was also under his doctor's medical care. So I am assuming that just maybe the person (s) he was having unprotected sex with was also taking PrEp. Which is a once a day pill that will PREVENT a person from becoming HIV infected. That's a double positive people. You cannot infect a person if your viral load is undetectable and your partner can also take PrEp. These are medical FACTS! There is no BUT!

3) Charlie admitted having sex with prostitutes and in those cases he used a condom and also disclosed his HIV status. BRAVO! Now, I know people with HIV who use a condom 100%, but do not disclose their HIV status. They feel, if their viral load is undetectable, why should they have to disclose. There are now doctors who share this same opinion. Personally, I think disclosure is the best policy, especially if the relationship grows. But at the end of the day everyone has to decide how they choose to live their life with HIV. I dare not judge another. So I say BRAVO that Charlie was upfront and honest.

Now, what's really jacked up in this case, is that someone took the information given to them for

there protection and used it against him. Even sadder, is the climate around HIV that creates an opening for someone to be blackmailed. **If people didn't judge those living with HIV so harshly, those living with HIV wouldn't be afraid to disclose, nor would there be any room to blackmail a person**. Yep, I came full circle back to STIGMA!

4) I cannot tell you where Charlie is in disease progression. If I had known his T-Cell Count and his Viral Load when he was first diagnosed, I could give you a good guess on how long he has actually been infected. Once you start treatment, there is no way for a lay person to figure it out. That is information he and his doctor knows. I do wonder about the night sweats, which sounds like an AIDS Related medical issue, rather than an HIV. There are no HIV symptoms.

These are the facts as told by Charlie,

He has been infected at least 4 years

He is in treatment

His viral Load is Undetectable

He is on an 4 HIV medicine Cocktail (BTW-So Am I)

5) Charlie is an addict. Addiction is not good for people living with HIV. First off, addiction has it's own medical issues, depending on your drug of choice. Secondly, alcohol and drugs can have an adverse effect on HIV medication. Even some over the counter and alternative medications can effect the viability of HIV medication. So lets hope he is getting the help that is needed to control addiction.

6) Charlie talked about Manic behavior. It has been long speculated that he might be BiPolar. IF this is the case he will have an up hill battle. Mental illness can be a barrier to complying with medical treatment of any kind. Also, depression is very common among people living with HIV. I have also had an up hill battle with depression that requires me to both be medicated and see regular talk therapy.

Lastly, should he have disclosed, earlier. I think a person should disclose when they are ready. He spoke another truth "**HIV are three words that are hard to absorb."** I get that. It took me 7 years and I still only disclosed because I thought that I was dying. Well with a T-Cell count of 8 I was, but then I had a great doctor and I did what was asked of me, no matter how difficult it was. I have also been drug and alcohol fee.

I have some compassion for Charlie Sheen. Is he my hero, no. Hydeia Broadbent is my HIV hero, born with HIV, she became an AIDS Activist at age 6 and has not stopped well into her thirties. Sheryl Lee Ralph is my HIV activist hero, an actress who is NOT infected but made a decision to do speak out for the rejected and locked out. YOU are my hero, those of you who follow me on my social media sites, read my blog, buy my bracelets because your support keeps me going, and growing, 32 years living with HIV.

I do however, think in an era where HIV is no longer a sexy topic, Charlie Sheen can help to open space for new dialogue. Charlie Sheen can use his money and his celebrity status to help. I mean really help. Does he have to become an AIDS Activist per say, no, but he can truly help. Shoot, I would love to partner with Charlie to speak at colleges across this country.

For sure there is still work to be done. Every 10 minutes a person becomes infected with HIV in the United States. Yes there is work to be done.

My hope is that Charlie Sheen will continue to get the needed help to live and thrive living with HIV.

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