Got My Brain Checked Out

February 6, 2015 By Shawn Decker

A few years ago I was scheduled to get the inner workings of my brain checked out. I'm not sure what lead to the scheduling of the appointment, perhaps I confided in my doctor that I felt particularly forgetful or just not with it mentally. What I do remember is that, a couple of days before the appointment, I cancelled.

Because I was scared as hell of what the results would be.

Instead of running those tests, I placed the blame on my HIV meds. Surely my mental fog was the result of those little buggers, right? So I tried a couple of different combinations... but, as the size, shape and color of the pills changed, the mental fog remained the same. As I thought about my options, there was a glimmer of hope that my brain wasn't atrophied from three decades of living with HIV...

The hope was in the form of Adderall.

Over the last several years, on occasion, I'd taken adderall. But not prescribed. If I had a huge writing task, I'd obtain it, but just for a few days use. I slept like a baby at night, I didn't feel hopped up or high. I felt, well, human. Like I could carry on a 10 minute conversation with a friend and not feel like I had to rush home for an hour-long nap afterwards.

I spoke openly with my HIV doc about my concerns, and that glimmer of hope. An appointment with a psychiatrist was made, and after an evaluation it was determined that I had ADD. Adderall was prescribed and I was monitored with monthly appointments. This was a year and a half ago, and my quality of life has improved dramatically since then. Not to mention that my worries of mental decay were alleviated... temporarily, at least.

A couple of months ago my insurance company took notice of my Adderall prescription. They must have said, "What a minute- Mr. Hemophilia and AIDS is on what???" As part of their standard practice they required further tests because, you know, what do doctors know that insurance companies don't? And I'm sure their accountants placed my well-being above all other priorities.

So, in a full circle moment, an appointment was made to determine my cognitive abilities. More puzzles and conversation than taping wires to my body and X-raying my brain. But still, those nervous feelings came back again. Was my mental clarity an adderall-created mirage? The kind of false bravado that convinces a beer-drinking 120-pound man to find the biggest guy in the bar to pick a fight with?

Though my fear was plausible, this time, I didn't cancel. Like my ADD diagnosis, I just wanted to know the truth about how well my mind is working. I didn't take adderall for a couple of days before the testing. That morning arrive, I woke up early, did the three hours of tests and then waited a couple of

weeks for the results...

The ADD was confirmed by the testing. Admittedly, I did better in some areas than others- but, ultimately, any fears of impaired cognitive abilities as a result of HIV were laid to rest. And, really, I couldn’t have asked for better results.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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