The One Thing We Must Do to Fight HIV and Meth

January 21, 2016 By Daniel Pintauro

I'm so excited to be blogging for POZ.com! Any opportunity to speak openly and honestly about HIV and Meth is one more conversation being had about these topics. And, I believe, the key to successfully make changes is to talk about them! Talking about them keeps them present, brings them back to the forefront, removes the stigma, and hopefully brings people to want to do something about them. In my first series of blogs I'm going to talk in depth about each of the major shifts I hope to we can make in the coming year.

To make these shifts, we, as a community, need to RALLY:

The gay community is so good at rallying. When the epidemic first hit in the '80s, everyone got involved in some way -- whether waving signs at rallies, calling politicians, donating money or delivering food to sick friends and strangers -- through collective action we made huge strides.

Unfortunately, it seems that once HIV became treatable and merely a life-threatening illness we stopped rallying. Or rather, we switched our rally efforts to something important but, in my opinion, not "life threatening." Prop 8 and marriage equality became the cause that every gay man and woman across the country rallied behind. And though the methods have changed (social media most notably), pretty much everybody in our community jumped on board and through collective action we made huge strides.

I'm so proud of what we have accomplished, but it angers me that we "put aside" HIV, and it angers me that we've always turned a blind eye to Meth. Imagine if we had continued to rally against HIV as hard and fiercely as we did in the '80s over the last ten years. It's possible we wouldn't even be having this conversation -- at the very least, new infections would certainly not have remained at a steady 50,000 a year in the United States. Yes, wonderful activists and community leaders have been working tirelessly to get us to act, and I applaud them for that -- I look up to all of them, but it angers me that it took a child celebrity and whatever you want to call Charlie Sheen to get our community to really listen again.

We already have the tools to wipe out NEW HIV infections, and these tools are so strong that if we could just get everyone on board to use them or follow them consistently we could essentially prevent new infections. STOP them, not just slow them, but STOP them. But availability of the helpful drugs and other methods of protection, knowledge of the drugs and other methods, and

adherence to the drugs and other methods are spotty at best in all communities affected by HIV. We should be rallying to change that -- is that not cause enough for us to throw every ounce of effort behind this effort?

Since taping my Oprah interview in May, and then waiting three whole months for the biggest secret of my life to hit the airwaves, I've focused on learning as much as I can about these epidemics. I quit my job and have spent the last two months speaking to activists, fans and experts to zero in on how I can make a difference. I'm broke and my husband is working four jobs, but I've developed a passionate desire to get us to rally! I believe it's time we focus on taking care of each other.

Stay tuned as I explore the shifts I know we can make -- if we can just ... RALLY again.

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