Since I Have HIV, Would You Still Kiss Me?

November 30, 2009 By Regan Hofmann

That is the $100,000 question of the day. It's similar to the one posed by the British Red Cross in their newly released World AIDS Day (tomorrow! December 1st!) video that shows sexy Konnie Huq being repeatedly shut down whilst angling for a smooch...all due to her temporarily-assumed- just-for-this-video-HIV-positive-status. She asks, conditionally: If I had HIV, would you kiss me?

See the video here: .

I think the video does an excellent job of showcasing how while people's knowledge about how HIV is--and isn't--transmitted has evolved for the better (85 percent of people polled know you can't get HIV from kissing an HIV-positive person), the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS prevails--causing even rational people to recoil and squirm (69 percent of the people polled said they wouldn't kiss someone with HIV even though they KNOW it's safe).

It's awesome to see a public health campaign focus on fighting stigma. At *POZ*, we are so convinced that the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS has become as deadly as the virus itself that we dedicated our entire December issue to examining its fatal power. In short, stigma keeps people from being educated about HIV/AIDS, from believing they can contract it, from getting tested for it, from disclosing their status if they have it and from seeking lifesaving medical care and emotional support. The stigma around HIV/AIDS also makes it harder to secure the financial and political capital we need to end the pandemic. Not to mention how stigma can undermine the strength and mental stability of those of us fighting for our lives against the virus!

Read Dec *POZ* here.

To further help the general public debunk the dangerous myths around HIV/AIDS, *POZ*, with our friends at Media Planet. also created a special World AIDS Day supplement for *The Washington Post*. It hit the streets today and hopefully will cause hundreds of thousands of readers to get tested for HIV. Because anyone who has ever had unprotected sex or shared drug injection equipment could have been exposed to HIV!

Read *The Washington Post* supplement here.

The supplement is an inside look at the myths and mispercetions that perpetuate our inability to crush the epidemic. It's a really good primer for anyone who wants to know the truth about HIV/AIDS. Think: Cliff Notes, for AIDS.

Finally, on poz.com/world, there is a list of all the events that POZ staff is attending this World AIDS Day (week). For example, tomorrow *POZ* Deputy Editor Oriol Gutierrez, *POZ* Art Production Manager Michael Halliday and I will be at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia for an all-day symposium on HIV/AIDS. Former President Clinton will address the group at lunch. Then, it's downtown to Washington Square Park to meet up with the folks at the Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR), including amfAR's Chairman of the Board, Kenneth Cole; Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon; actress and UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador Naomi Watts and others for the launch of the "Light for Rights" campaign (a joint effort between amfAR, UNAIDS, the World AIDS Campaign and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS). Watch for the lights on Broadway, Madison Square Garden, the Brooklyn Bridge and other NYC landmarks to dim. (For more info: lightforrights.com.) THEN, it's on to the red carpet for AID for AIDS' "My Hero Gala"--their big swanky fundraiser hosted by fashion designer Narciso Rodriguez and Miss Universe 2009 Stefania Fernandez. (Thank heavens Oriol speaks Spanish perfectly!). (For more info: aidforaids.org.)

On second thought, perhaps the $100,000 question of the day is not "Would you still kiss me even though I have HIV?" but rather "Will all of our World AIDS Day activities, whether studious or glam, petite or grand, effect the way the world sees people living with HIV--for the better?" Let's hope so!

What are you doing for World AIDS Day? Do tell...

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