Life Support

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By Michael Halliday (Art Production Manager, POZ)

On Monday morning the phone rang at my desk. It was a very good friend I had not spoken with in several years. He was calling from the hospital where he had been admitted with pneumonia about a week ago. He is HIV positive--a fact he knows I was aware of--but he had not told his doctors and did not want to tell them. As he had done for so many years, he was hoping that he could keep AIDS at bay by not admitting he had HIV.

He said to me: “If I have AIDS, I will have to take medications the rest of my life. I will turn into a disfigured monster, and I will be saddled with expensive bills.” My job at POZ keeps me well informed, so I explained to him that many people who are properly treated do not have lipodystrophy (body fat changes) and that today’s medications have become much more tolerable, so he would most likely be able to manage any side effects. Plus, I knew he had health insurance, so I assured him that his health care costs would be manageable.

I knew he’d read some AIDS denialist propaganda and that he did not want to face the facts. But I also knew that his denial was putting him in grave danger.

I told him that he needed to tell his doctors about his HIV so they could find out what was going on. If they didn’t properly assess the issue, then his health could rapidly decline and he could be at risk of dying!

I finally managed to get through to him, and he agreed to let the doctors give him an HIV test. They soon discovered he had pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP) and put him on treatment. He was very relieved when he started to recover quickly. For him, it was a wake-up call and a reality check.

For me it was a reminder that many of our HIV-positive brothers and sisters are not well informed. Many do not even know they are HIV positive. This lack of knowledge is putting them at risk. We all need testing and proper medical monitoring and treatment to preserve our health.

I’m glad my friend called me to ask for help. We need to support one another in times of crisis as well as on a day-to-day basis.

Answer the call! That’s what friends are for!

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