Live at the Witch Trials (The Protocol is on its Way)

January 16, 2012 By Sean Strub

A few days ago I received a remarkable manuscript from Rex Pilgrim, a writer in Australia. Rex's article is titled "Live At the Witch Trials or New Adventures in HIV; Farce As Deterrent In Health Promotion"

Rex's story is a highly personal one, but it is relevant to all of us who are concerned about an eroding respect for patient autonomy and individual rights at the altar of poorly designed and administered "public health" interventions. When Rex sought treatment for depression from a Sexual Health and Aids Counseling Team, attached to a local AIDS medical unit, he received a rude awakening.

The focus of the story is the unintended consequences that may occur when public health agencies co-opt therapists to act as sex police and HIV status is linked to criminal law. In this story the results are counter-productive for the patient and, I believe, for public health itself.

Rex was having an honest discussion about his life, including his sex life, and said that he did not always disclose with sex partners that he had HIV. Here's what he described happened next:

"From here the session fell apart. She [the psychologist] evealed she was obliged to terminate the counselling and address safe sex and disclosure. I countered that I didn't believe this was a significant issue, that I was well informed, informed enough to know about risk reduction.

I pointed out I'd come voluntarily to see her, principally about depression and I didn't want to be diverted away from that, believing that depression was more important. The meeting foundered. She announced that I was placing other people at risk of HIV infection and she was obliged to report me to Queensland Health's Panel that oversees the Protocol. She waved the Protocol at me, a red/orange document that shouted its warning with its colour.

I sensed something was going very wrong. I said I didn't believe I had placed anybody at risk, noting that I'm an exclusive bottom who is not pumping infected cum up anyone's arse and that I've been able to maintain an undetectable viral load for years and have exemplary adherence with taking meds. None of this mattered.

It didn't matter that most of the sex I have is sero-sorted, with other poz guys or that the amount of undisclosed and unprotected sex was only a small part of the sex I've had and that if there was any risk it was

hardly “serious”. But it had occurred. And I would be reported."

Rex’s story gets worse and you can read the entire article here. It’s sharp and moving and darkly entertaining.

But whether you click through to read the entire saga or not know that his experience was unacceptable and unjustified. Unfortunately the “The Protocol”, or something like it, under whatever name, may be coming to your country, your state, your community and your life next.

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