A Message for HIV Vaccine Advocacy Day

May 16, 2020 By Mark S. King

To commemorate HIV Vaccine Advocacy Day on Monday, May 18, I recorded a brief video as part of an awareness project for the New Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Society.

My message was simple. Vaccines take time, factual science, and patience.

I will never forget listening to HHS Secretary Margaret Heckler in 1984, right after HIV had been identified. She predicted a vaccine would be developed within two years (she has since regretted that rosy prediction). And now, after 36 years and no functional HIV vaccine as of yet, the President predicts a vaccine for COVID within months.

Fool me once…

Actually, I trust the committed people behind HIV vaccine research far more than the bumper-sticker public health strategy of our federal government. There have been steady, incremental breakthroughs in the HIV vaccine arena, and much more is now known about the scientific direction HIV vaccines must take to succeed.

The text of my video message:

Once upon a time, our government announced that we would have a vaccine for a new virus within two years. Sound familiar? Except that hopeful statement was made more than 35 years ago, and that new virus was HIV.

The lesson here is that, despite what you might be

hearing lately, vaccines don’t appear magically, they don’t result from press conferences or boasting or tweets. They require factual science, painstaking research, adequate funding, and yes, patience.

That’s why I support HIV Vaccine Advocacy Day on May 18th. Vaccines are one of the strongest tools we have to end any pandemic. Support HIV vaccine research. Support science, not sound bites.

Please take time to learn about the work of groups such as AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coaltion, the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, or the HIV Vaccine Network. Support them if you can or look into clinical trials.

It won’t surprise me at all if HIV vaccine research informs and accelerates the work toward a COVID vaccine.

Here’s hoping.

Mark

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