Numbers, Lies, and the Life they Bleed

December 15, 2009 By Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP

Talk to me damnit. Talk to me. Don't talk to my numbers. Talk to me. I am the person sitting in the room pretending things are good. The numbers are static deviled details.

Stop staring at the smudges of computer printed ink all neatly lined up in a nice column. They are numbers. I am not. Numbers lie. They are nothing but medical markers to make you happy. Yes, they make me happy too sometimes. But today I want someone to talk to me, and remember numbers lie.

My numbers have tumbled to horrifying lows and I felt fine. They have blazed off the page and my world turned to shit.

Today is one of those days. But it is no longer just a day now and then. Twenty years of pills has taken its toll and I want someone to talk to me - not my numbers.

I have swallowed 98,550 pills that I can easily count in the last 18 years; the real count has got to more. Much more. My pills are toxic but they save my life. Or is my life toxic and the pills are just hobgoblins that slide down a throat?

I am witness, prosecutor, and defendant in this AIDS battle. I am also one of million walking wounded. Most days I can tuck those wounds away from view. Other times they ooze out of every cell in my body.

I provide AIDS medical care to others; others provide AIDS medical care to me. I come and go in the same room and often do not have a clue as to my whereabouts.

Someone talk to me. My numbers never talk back. Find out what is hovering beneath the rehearsed and shinny surfaces. Nice clothes, muscles, and manners hide a lot of dents in the armor.

I often don't even want the impossible. I just don't want to be dismissed. Forget what the numbers say on the paper flipping out of your printer. In between the nice neat rows of lab data are there are real "values"? Do you know about my daily dry heaves? My constant and chronic pain that nothing touches anymore. How the sudden and paralyzing fear of it all comes out of the blue and cuts deeply into a vein.

Where is the cure? My numbers and muscles may give you the false hope all people long for in a never ending disaster but what about my nausea, fatigue, and shortness of breath.

Stop talking to the numbers. They are the surrogates of fools. Numbers go up and down. They multiple and are linear. Nice and neat. AIDS is not. AIDS is jumbled, harsh, and painful.

If I could I would take all the Red Ribbons and bind them together into a noose. Let's see who wants to swing from that?

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.