One Guy With AIDS. One Cup.

July 30, 2011 By Shawn Decker

All of my friends know my HIV status. And when I make new friends, I'm pretty open about it because it's hard to explain any aspect of my past and present existence without disclosing my status.

Over the last ten years, I've been shooting pool in a local 8-Ball league. Brought in by some buddies, I've made lots of new friends on the team over the years, all of whom have been extremely supportive of my HIV status and how I live my life with my pet virus. I love it when someone on the team cracks an unexpected joke that involves my medical resume, whether it's hemophilia or HIV, because it shows me that they know I'm comfortable with it. The jokes are never mean-spirited, and often I'm making a joke first to get a reaction. But I like it when I'm beaten to the punchline.

A couple of months ago, our team went to Richmond for a tournament. Our table was covered with cups of water and beer bottles. People started to write their names on their cups, so I decided to mark mine with the word "AIDS", and wait for a teammate to see it and laugh, which is what happened.

Here's the cup.



I posted the photo on Facebook because I thought the joke was funny, and most people got it. But one person said that HIV could be transmitted this way, and was quickly shot down. About a week or so ago I saw a poll that reveal that 1 in 4 people thought that HIV could be transmitted through sharing a glass of water, and suddenly my joke seemed a lot less funny.

Fellow Poz-blogger and positoid Oriol just wrote a blog entry on how a newspaper article misinformed readers by casually explaining that HIV could be transmitted through saliva.

One of the ways I keep my spirits up is by trying to ignore the tremendous gaps in knowledge about HIV transmission, while simultaneously working to be a part of the solution and not the problem. In my personal life, my sense of humor and acceptance of my status does so much good for my health. I've worked hard to incorporate that sense of humor into my educational work as well, understanding that a good joke helps me out and that the same thing helps open ears to a topic that many folks have no interest in learning more about.

In retrospect do I regret sharing a joke that was meant for 7 friends with over 1,000 people on Facebook? Not really. But in the future I may have to preemptively add the asterisk mark explaining

that, no, there is no risk of getting HIV from a plastic cup of water. In the end, misinformation is far more easily spread than HIV.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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