The Pressure of HIV

A recent diagnosis of high blood pressure shows how important it is to know your family's health history.

June 5, 2019 By Aundaray Guess

I was recently at a local urgent care medical center for an issue I was having with my wrist. It seemed while weightlifting, I may have tried to lift more than I could, which resulted in an injury. As the nurse was getting my vitals, which included my blood pressure, she looked at me and asked if I was okay. Having no symptoms other than the pain in my wrist, I shared that information with her. She proceeded to tell me that my blood pressure was not only high but extremely high. In fact, it was reading 200/94, way above the average reading of 120.

Instead of being surprised, she confirmed something my doctor had started to monitor. It seems that for the past 6 months, my blood pressure readings were high. My primary doctor expressed concerns and wanted me to make some adjustments in diet and exercise, but it seemed based on my recent reading that I wasn't doing enough.

Finally, after visiting a cardiologist, the nurse confirmed that I had mild heart disease with hypertension. The good news was that I caught it early. I've always felt that a benefit of having HIV was that it forced you to see a doctor regularly, as those visits can identify medical issues before they progress. A reality is that other people often wait until they have symptoms that have progressed, sometimes to the point of being too late.

Knowing I have high blood pressure created immediate fear as I remember my mother struggling with high blood pressure, resulting in a stroke which forced her into managed care. In my case, it seemed that my condition was hereditary as again I practically lived at the gym and didn't consider myself an unhealthy eater—I had eliminated junk food and sugars from my diet a while ago.

And I'm also aware that a high rate of African-American men are diagnosed with HIV. And that leads me to once again ponder that health and diet are related to racism, whether it appears as micro-aggressions or overt discrimination.

Yet I wonder if others are like me. Others who have yet to consider their family medical history. If more people were to explore this history, what would they learn? What questions would be raised? For example, simply because a family member has a medical issue, does that mean you're destined to have it?

My health situation was also a reminder of the relationship I have (or don't have) with my family, who have chosen to reject me because of my sexuality. In my case, it's not an easy path to discover what illnesses my siblings or mother has, especially when I'm not in contact with them. I would have to ask extended family members if they are aware of any health issues that run throughout the family.

Living with HIV is a beast itself, so the last thing one wants to do is deal with other health issue. Yet it's our reality, and as we age with HIV, the truth is that dealing only with your HIV status is not living in reality. As we get older, other issues that go along with aging will start to morph and appear. The best thing you can do is get ahead of any illnesses and check in regularly with your HIV primary doctor.

Although I wish I didn't have to deal with high blood pressure and the medications associated with it, I will admit I'm glad that I did discover it early before it had progressed to a critical stage. And knowing that high blood pressure can lead to a stroke or worse, I feel I can make the needed changes in my life, the same way I did when I discovered my HIV status.

So I again advocate for everyone to learn as much as they can about family history as it relates to illnesses. If that's not possible, make sure you're having important conversations with your medical provider on any test results that should be monitored.

I'm happy to report that with new high blood pressure medications, my blood pressure results have me in the normal range. Thankful that by learning about self and family, I'm one step ahead of the game.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/pressure-hiv