PWNCares 3: “Disclosure–It’s Complicated” Explores the Complexities of Disclosure

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“Who can I tell? Who should I tell? How do I decide–and how do I do it?” These simple questions are often the toughest for someone newly diagnosed with HIV – and for many of us, they don’t get easier to

answer. Over three decades into the epidemic, despite amazing scientific and medical advances in treatment and care that allow people diagnosed with HIV to live long, healthy, fulfilling lives and prevent transmission, discrimination against people with HIV is still strong–and far too often, HIV stigma is internalized. We live in a society that simultaneously tells people living with HIV that they have done something wrong and that they must tell others. But disclosure can have real consequences. That is why Positive Women's Network – USA (PWN-USA) is hosting an open forum for women living with HIV to share their thoughts, concerns and experiences with disclosure on March 8, ahead of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.

"I just could not deal with the shame…It took a long time for me to get comfortable enough to start telling other people," said Venita Ray, one of the women featured in the video. "From 2007 [four years after diagnosis] to 2011, when I went fully public, it was a very gradual, slow process. It was hardest to tell the people who loved me. It took a long time to realize I hadn't done anything wrong…To tell someone close to me meant I had to engage with those feelings."

In the video, the third in the #PWNCares series, four women living with HIV of different ages and backgrounds will share their experiences navigating the complications of disclosure in a variety of contexts: from family members to employers, colleagues, romantic interests and hookup buddies. These four women will answer questions and share more of their experiences and insights in a virtual coffee table chat on Thursday, March 8, at 3pm EST. This video launch and open online Q&A forum is open to all women living with HIV, including women of trans experience; register here.

"Our goal in producing this video and hosting this virtual coffee table chat is not to tell women diagnosed with HIV that they need to disclose their status to anyone, or that they should ever feel pressure to do so," explained Naina Khanna, executive director of PWN-USA. "It is rather to let women living with HIV know they are not alone; that lots of other women, like the women in this video, like myself, have been there. We know how complicated it is, and we have lived both the benefits and consequences of disclosing. There is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to disclosure, no matter what health officials, doctors or lawmakers say."

#PWNCares, an interactive new multimedia series made possible by the generous support of ViiV Healthcare, is intended to address some of the biggest challenges facing women living with HIV, especially those who have been recently diagnosed or who are isolated. Past episodes include Living and Loving Well with HIV, which addresses intimate partner violence and healthy relationships, and Undetectable=Untransmittable, in which women living with HIV share their knowledge about how adherence to treatment prevents transmission and what that has meant for them. The videos and the recorded virtual coffee table chats can be viewed at the links above; there are also discussion guides available so that the videos can be used in support groups, meetings or events.

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