



I Have Questions and Answers: A Recap from the International Workshop on Women & HIV 2025

When we, as a community, have access to support, treatment, care, resources, a stake in what actually happens in our lives – we can change the trajectory of bloodlines for generations to come.

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This post by Ciarra “Ci Ci” Covin, originally appeared on [Healing Is Voluntary](#) and was cross-posted on [The Well Project](#)

[The International Workshop on Women and HIV](#) is a special meeting for me. In 2021, this was the first opportunity that I had to speak on an international stage. At this time, it was virtual because you know – COVID. I was pregnant with Babygirl Zuri then.

Can you believe that she is a whole freaking 3 and a half years old now? Wow, time really does pass quickly.

But what I remember the most about that panel is that I was at the beginning of what felt like an impossible, daunting, scary, anxiety-ridden decision of how I was going to feed the baby growing inside of my body. Those feelings were often comforted when I had the opportunity to hear directly from providers who had long cared for other women living with HIV who breastfed, and their babies remained free of HIV. Even more so when I spoke to the moms, themselves, who had accomplished such a great feat.

The International Workshop on Women and HIV afforded me that opportunity. Although not yet in person, I had begun building relationships with people across the world with missions aligned with my own personal one. The one that aims to humanize those of us who are living with HIV and not allowing our diagnosis to dictate the way we are treated inside and outside of the healthcare system.

Look, I say all of that now but I ain’t really realize it was so big right then. I just wanted to feed my baby like I watched all of the other Mommies feed their babies. The harder they fought, the harder I was going to fight cus I saw there was access SOMEwhere. And I wanted that. Run me mines.

It's important that this type of representation is recognized, appreciated, and honored. And even more than that, it must be the standard. We all bring value to this work and to the people that we serve on a day-to-day basis. They need us.

Fast forward 4 years later and Krista Martel (The Well Project's executive director) and I are literally standing on the stage at this very workshop in Barcelona, Spain presenting results from a survey that we conducted on provider's attitudes about breast/chestfeeding before and after the guideline updates in the United States.

It was special. Not only were there people from various capacities from all over the world (missing so many of my African brothers and sisters that I always look forward to seeing in person. I am sending my love and prayers) – but what made it even more special is that when I looked into the audience, the leaders of the Dandelion Movement were all there in support. I mean, the moment was magical. A true testament of how when we, as a community, have access to support, treatment, care, resources, a stake in what actually happens in our lives – we can change the trajectory of bloodlines for generations to come.

I mean, so much had happened between 2021 and this moment of presenting on this stage. And, honestly, it was a lot to soak in. My thoughts were running so fast.

* I had that baby.

* I fed that baby.

* That baby is still HIV free.

* I led implementation of BEEBAH (The Well Project's 3-year breast/chestfeeding and HIV related programming) in multiple roles.

* I have survived the early years of teenagerhood.

* That "baby" is also still HIV free.

* I was a part of advocacy that got national guidelines updated with the hopes of positively impacting my people.

* I have learned and engaged better ways to take care of myself.

* I have traveled across the country (and now, even outside of it) to spread awareness about the importance in engaging parents in shared decision making in all of their healthcare and even more specifically, in the area of pregnancy and infant feeding.

* I have been published in an academic journal.

* I've connected with people from the HIV community that affirm the need for the work to continue.

* I have embraced what I have to offer this world.

* I have loved and allowed others to love me.

* I have learned so much.

... not an exhaustive list. Just providing a little context.

To stand on that stage and present is one thing.

To be the one to sit on the panel for Q&A is another.

How I'm supposed to answer any questions these people have?

How am I supposed to formulate a response that doesn't get immediately rejected by the folks asking it because it sounds too amateur?

But I did that.

Does that make me an expert?

Damn. I might actually be an expert.

Not at everything.

Cus one thing for sure and two things for certain, I couldn't sing to save my life.

My lane though? Hells yea! I got that.

It's important that this type of representation is recognized, appreciated, and honored. And even more than that, it must be the standard. We all bring value to this work and to the people that we serve on a day-to-day basis. They need us.

I don't think I am trying to convince you.

It is more of trying to convince myself.

After experiencing feelings of being overlooked, undervalued, and neglected for so long sometimes it takes others to remind you of your light.

Thank you all for doing that for me.

Each and every single one of you.

+Ci Ci+

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/questions-answers-recap-international-workshop-women-hiv-2025>