Self Disclosure

March 8, 2012 By Aundaray Guess

This is the last on a series of discussing the many forms of disclosure for those living with HIV. In the past three articles I looked at HIV disclosure as it relates to employment, love and family. This part is the over looked form of disclosure, disclosure to yourself.

When I was first told that I had HIV, I heard the news but I didn't fully accept it. At the time I was diagnosed I felt fine and wasn't sick and didn't have no external signs of HIV which was something you looked for back in the 80's, so in my mind I didn't have it.

I didn't have it because I couldn't see it or touch it or tell someone what it looked like. The only proof I had it was based on some words on a piece of paper given to me by the doctor. Words that I came from the ink of a pen of which I wasn't going to let it change my life. I was in denial.

Since I had my head in the sand I didn't feel the need to manage something that I made myself believe that I didn't have. So there was no need for me to see a doctor to help manage my 'supposed' disease. There was no need to take pills especially when I had it in my head that to do so was admitting. I was perfectly healthy and didn't need no form of treatment.

The truth was I had yet to come to a place where I was ready to acknowledge my illness. I had not come to a place of disclosing my status to the man looking back at me in the mirror. I had myself believe that If I pretended it didn't exist or if I didn't talk about it, it would simply go away.

I often hear people who are HIV say, "I have HIV but HIV doesn't have me."

When you're in a place of non-disclosure to even yourself, it does have you. And when you're in that place of denial it's not only yourself you put at risk but also others, especially if you're sexually active and not wrapping it up.

There's also the matter of planting the seeds of not seeking treatment for new mental health issues that will probably come your way. Depression is usually the first to stand in line as it prepares itself to affect the way you operate. Maybe standing behind depression might be anxiety and next in line could be one mental health illness we don't associate with HIV, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). an HIV diagnosis has been linked to the development of PTSD symptoms. A diagnosis of HIV may be perceived as a traumatic event as people may feel as though their life is threatened and may experience fear, helplessness, and/or horror as a result of the diagnosis. In addition, it has been found that believing the stigma attached to an HIV diagnosis may increase the severity of PTSD symptoms among individuals living with HIV/AIDS

But to come to a place of healing I had to accept. It was the only way my life was going to move forward. It had to start with me.

I was not only infected but also affected, but thank God for this one nurse who gave me a bitch slap. She let me know, despite my denial I do have it and I can proceed with my life in two ways. I can choose to live or I can slowly die. And in her description of dying what she meant was that I could focus so much on the death aspect of having HIV that I would become the living dead, not enjoying the life I was gifted with.

To live my life in the honest light I had to accept the truth and disclose to myself that yes I had HIV.

And even though the clouds didn't part and the sun came out shining, I was comfort in the fact that by knowing I was preparing myself for the long journey ahead.

I can say it has been a long road, but what is life without challenges. Even if I didn't have HIV there would be obstacles and these obstacles only make you stronger. And I even came to a place that God had a plan for me. By writing these words for others to read is part of that plan as I hope I have inspired others or let people know that they were not alone.

But the one lesson I did learn about having HIV was that life is not a promised gift and to enjoy the life that you do have. And despite my condition there is someone worse off than me as I write these words.

My disclosure set me free and allowed me to strip myself of shame. I refuse to be a walking dead and although it may not be a perfect life, its the one I was gifted with so this brotha is going to make lemonade with those lemons and it's going to be sweet, cool and refreshing.

With the end of my look at disclosure I appreciate all the conversations as everyone sharing their perspective gives new perspectives. It may need to be revisited but for now I'm exhaling and taking a much needed vacation so I'll see everyone in two weeks and on my time off I'm going to do repeat my mantra after I had disclosed to myself. I'm going to remind myself.....

I have HIV and I'm going to live!!

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