And STILL... Undetectable!

May 28, 2021 By Shawn Decker

I blogged recently about trying a structured treatment interruption that consists of four days on (Mon-Thurs) and then three days off of my HIV medication. This week I went for labs and, after my fourth week on this new schedule, the results couldn't have been any better: I'm still undetectable!

The next test will be, well, the next tests. Probably in a month or two.

In terms of my own health, I wasn't too worried about giving this a go. That feeling of calm was based on my past success with structured treatment interruptions. I guess the thing I wanted to be sure of was that my viral load remained undetectable so that there was no chance of transmitting the virus to my life partner, Gwenn. I blogged about what it was like to forgo condoms a few years ago. If there is a blip in my viral load, I'm okay with the prospect of returning to uninterrupted treatment.

What will be interesting going forward will be how roughly half the pills will affect my cholesterol, which has been ridiculously high for over a decade now. Now that I'm in my mid-40s, I need to take that threat more seriously. I tried to take medication to lower the cholesterol a while back and, keeping true to my less-is-more approach, I started on a very low dose. It worked in terms of bringing my cholesterol down, but my liver enzymes shot through the roof. Since I have hepatitis B and non-progressive hepatitis C, I didn't really want to poke those dragons just because the frogs in the pond were starting to keep me up at night.

I'll continue to document this journey here. Since I started on HIV medications in 1999, I've been thankful for their success in keeping HIV in check for me, but I've also kept tabs on my quality of life. I've switched meds more times than I can remember, and not once has it ever been because a combo has failed to keep me undetectable. And I know how fucking lucky I truly am for that. That said, I'm also thankful that I have a doctor that understands both sides of the equation, the numbers that reveal the truth under the skin as well as the human being sitting right there in front of him.

I'm not advocating for switch ups. If what you are doing is working for you, that's wonderful. But I do advocate for having discussions with your doctor if your quality of life is being dramatically affected by your drug regimen. I belong to a local online support group, and some recently posted that they are deeply unhappy with a lingering side effect of their HIV medications. In most cases, there are other options. But I know that some doctors go strictly "by the numbers", often to the

detriment of their patients.

Anyway, I just wanted to pass along the good news on this end. I hope this finds you well and thanks for following along and keeping tabs on my journey.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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