Trouble

September 3, 2008 By Paul Dalton

Two of my closest friends are grappling with very different problems- both HIV related.

I went to a concert on Sunday with J, a woman living with HIV and fellow metal head. We were getting ready to go see Judas Priest, Heaven and Hell (Sabbath with Dio), Motorhead and Testament. I asked her how life was treating her.

Her face told me immediately all was not well.

?I have a lump on my breast,? she shared.

She is in the midst of figuring out what is going on, but the signs aren?t good. She is set for some more tests- and is expecting a cancer diagnosis. Already struggling with lipodystrophy, she is now wondering if more body changes are on the way.

Last night I got a call from another friend N, who is acting co Executive Director of a small, HIV focused acupuncture and herbal clinic in SF. Without dishing dirt here- she is only acting as ED because of the mess left behind by others- and from what she said the mess is big. They are spending much more money than they are bringing in, their government funding has been slashed, and their line of credit is maxed out.

I love both of them and their struggles are very personal. They also seem somewhat emblematic of the epidemic these days. Non-HIV specific health concerns grow increasingly important. Data were presented in Mexico City showing an increased risk of non-HIV cancers for HIVers. HIV service agencies are struggling to raise money, and even keep their doors open as donor fatigue and flat-to-declining government funding results in a shrinking pie being divided in to smaller and smaller pieces.

I didn?t have much to offer either of them. I know next to nothing about fund raising or running an agency. I know something about breast cancer (my Mom is a survivor), but much less than Jen does. In both cases, all I can do is be there.

In the bigger picture though, the work of AIDS activism is these problems. We work for better funding of AIDS agencies, and better understanding of HIV and health. We struggle against disease and for wellness.

Their struggles are both personal and professional to me. They are first and foremost loved ones- people who I care deeply for who are facing their own struggles. They are also examples of the need to keep suiting up for the fight.

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