# Unrestrained Intimacy and pleasure

August 4, 2008 By Paul Dalton

Day one at the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City

Yesterday there was a satellite session dedicated to the Swiss statement. A panel of 7 dissected and debated many aspects of the report, from the calculations used in studies to the applicability of its findings to resource poor countries. The discussion was full and robust. However, if it weren?t for the one panelist living with HIV, the reality of sex would have barely been mentioned.

Isn?t it interesting that in all the rancor elicited by the Swiss Statement, so little has been mentioned about sexual intimacy or pleasure. Virtually lost in the back and forth has been the very real, (if uncomfortable to some) fact that people with HIV want to have uninhibited intimacy and full sexual pleasure.

Thank god for Nicos- the ?community? (read positive) member of yesterday?s panel. He fearlessly broached the subjects of intimacy and pleasure, seemingly unafraid of the judgments of others.

This reinforced the importance of community. HIV activism created a new paradigm where people living with the disease demanded, and were granted a seat at the proverbial table. Our perspectives, while not always welcomed have managed to play a central role in shaping the myriad responses to the epidemic, from drug development to social marketing campaigns to biomedical prevention initiatives.

No matter how smart, compassionate or well meaning a researcher is, they can not know what it like to live with HIV, unless they are themselves living with HIV. I am careful here to point out that no one person, or group of people can speak for all people living with HIV. Nonetheless, our perspectives are invaluable to crafting successful responses to the epidemic.

As a person with HIV, I know full well what it is like to carry the burdens of this virus. I want to both protect my HIV negative sex partners, and fully enjoy sex. I know the anxiety that disclosure brings with it. At least I know these things for me, which is more than anyone not living with this damn virus can say.

As I walked around the Global Village yesterday, I was continuously struck by the humanity of AIDS- the faces, the stories, the lives that it touches. Sex is part of life. Sex is part of the response to the AIDS epidemic. As people living with HIV we should strive to be as brave as Nikos, and

speak our truths.

to read more from Mexico, please check into Project Inform’s online coverage at https://www.poz.com/article/project-inform-leader-hiv-hepatitis-c-advocacy-likely-close

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