What I Think of the New Findings on Anti-Retroviral Treatment

January 6, 2011 By Shawn Decker

I take a lot of pride in my work, which is educating college students on the proper use of condoms. I don't do this alone- my wife partner, Gwenn, speaks alongside me.

She is HIV negative, and I am HIV positive.

If you're reading my blog, you probably already know all of this. One of the reasons I take so much pride in my work as an educator is because it is personal; we are sharing intimate details of our life together, and how a condom (and someone with HIV) can be a working part of a healthy sexual relationship.

I've been using condoms for the entirety of my adult sex life, and I must say that the condom is my friend. Since I was diagnosed so young - at age 11 - I never had a sex life pre-HIV infection; it's always tagged along as a third wheel. These days, I have a healthy respect for the long journey I've taken, all the doubts and fears of rejection I had to overcome before I realized- in the context of that dating world- that, "Hey, I'm a catch, too!"

A recent study has shown that HIV negatives ("negatoids", as I call them) can use ARV (Anti-retroviral) treatment to prevent themselves from contracting HIV. There's a lot of excitement surrounding this study, and one would think that someone like me would jump at the chance to experience sexual intercourse without a condom for the first time... a re-devirginization process of sorts.

Sounds exciting, huh?

But part of living with HIV for me has been the reality of what it means to take these medications. I've been on ARVs for twelve years now, and the side effects can be pretty taxing. I've changed medication three times, not because it wasn't working, but because of side effects, which included nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, confusion... despite being on a combination that presents fewer side effects, I wouldn't want Gwenn to endure any of this just so I could satisfy a sexual curiosity.

I started on meds when I was upgraded to an official AIDS diagnosis in 1999, when my t-cells crashed to below 40 after hovering around the 200-mark for years as my viral load shot through the roof like the pyrotechnics that kick off a pro wrestling television show. I'd also lost close to forty pounds over a four-month period. Just before my crash, I'd met Gwenn, and we'd fallen in love. Part of me felt like I was dragging her along for a ride I didn't really want to be on myself.

Without the medication I wouldn't have survived. I am deeply thankful I've been given the opportunity to forge a wonderful life with Gwenn, and also the ability to keep up with a somewhat hectic travel

schedule. For sero-diverse (I hate the term “discordant”) couples like us, I wouldn’t recommend pursuing a condomless sexual relationship unless the intent is for procreation, not recreation. As for the public in general, in instances where it is impossible for a female (or male) to negotiate condom use, because the “dominate” male refuses, using ARVs could be a safeguard. That goes to a deeper question of creating a worldwide society where everyone- including sex workers- is sexually empowered… secretly ingesting potentially toxic ARVs before having sex isn’t the most ideal way to get there, but if it prevents an HIV infection in a certain situation then I am all for it.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

PS… it’s a complicated issue, here are two Comments from the Poz news article linked above:

Dave, SF, CA, *2010-11-29 16:32:49*

Wow. People are being infected with HIV in alarming. Condoms have not provided an end to the epidemic. Why we can’t pursue a cure for HIV while developing more effective prevention tools? The fact is that resources for treatment implementation, treatment research and prevention should all be fully funded and not pitted against each other.

Richard, Cleveland, OH, *2010-11-29 00:58:17*

Four thousand people languish on ADAP wait-lists and HIV cure researchers have taken to youtube to petition the public for funds. Meanwhile, the NIH uses OUR tax dollars to fund a study which will benefit people who choose to put themselves at risk. The only thing more

bewildering than why the government has funded this study is the question of why everyone is excited, rather than infuriated.

Watch, Friend and Follow me on:
YouTube, Facebook and Twitter
Website: ShawnandGwenn.com Also check out the lovely Gwenn's Fashion/Coffee Blog
My CD, Synthetic Division, A Symptom of Life, is on iTunes!

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