They are Just Pill Stupid!

January 22, 2009 By Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP

Well it seems my entry into the POZ blog world is making people think, get annoyed, and even some appear to have the answers to my life's problems. This is just great, but who the hell asked you? Not me.

Anyway, tonight I am about five days into my new pills and feel like I have been dropped kicked by a Dominican nun. But my gut tells all is going to be okay. The new pills are slowly settling into place and hopefully we will establish a respectful coexistence.

I was struck by the reader who said maybe I was demonizing HIV therapy a little too much, and he has a good point. But the fact of the matter is what failed to get across is that those of us living with HIV and hepatitis (and any other life-threatening chronic disease for that matter) is that the drug companies have brainwashed us into believing that if we take THEIR AIDS MEDS everything will be just grand. We will all be on a sail boat, muscled up, tanned, and having a fuck of a good time. Or maybe be so damn excited about once a day therapy we will be jumping over dildos in Times Squares (they were dildos weren't they?) Well guess what...bullshit. They are just pills. Damn good pills, but just pills nonetheless.

I talk to my patients about this all the time. I tell them pills are just medications in a bottle. They are not magic beans. You cannot think life is going to get better just by talking some funny looking tablets a couple of times a day. There is a lot of other stuff that goes with the damn chemotherapy. If you don't clean up your house - at least a little - all the damn pills in the world aren't going to do you much good.

I should know. I was the poster boy for bad behavior (as I have previously pointed out and will again and again). I can distinctly recall swallowing my AIDS meds with 12 year old Scotch for nights on end, and never did it occur to me that maybe it was not such a great idea. Or making sure I took my meds as I was filling up syringes with meth to slam. I made sure everything had its time and place. I actually got really pissed once as I was puking my AIDS meds up that caused me to miss my vein to inject meth. Why the hell did the AIDS meds have to make me so fucking sick I thought. Got to love the magical thinking of addition.

But those are extreme examples and I damn lucky to have escaped. However, the stuff that most people deal with - while it may not be as dramatic as my little gig ? is still screwing them over. I see it every day. People continue to smoke cigarettes, consider gravy a daily beverage, and develop severe hand and thumb pain from too many clicks of the remote. Anyone who thinks that any pill in any bottle for any disease is going to rise up and heal in the face of life of toxic chemicals and fat needs to rethink that reality because it isn't going to happen.

Outside of practicing HIV medicine I am also a personal trainer. People at the gym come up to me daily and ask questions and want advice. First, they want to know how old I am (I am 53 and proud of it) and how did I get such a nice body. Don't get me wrong I am flattered every single time this happens, but I

simply say I worked for it. I had to make hard choices. I had to put down the booze and drugs, fix the way I eat, and hit the gym with someone who actually knows how to work out. (Actually, the reason I became an AFAA certified personal trainer was to help my patients with action and not just talk - and NO I don't charge patients training fees so get your "holier-than-thou" fingers off the keyboard right now.)

But I believe living a well life still takes more than diet, exercise, and limiting toxins. It takes humor, hope, love, and God. Yes, I use the God word. If it annoys you - well fuck off. Use any word you want. This is my blog and I believe in God. You can call God your "higher power", Mike or Shirley for all I care. Just know that there is something out there greater than you and tap into it. Don't buy it? Just try telling the sun to set at noon and see how far you get.

HIV meds are great but they are just pills. AIDS is a hard disease to live with no matter how well you do it or how much you have to clean up your act. It is hard no matter what cards have been dealt you.

It is also important to remember life, living with AIDS, and dealing with the world is slow and evolving process. It takes time to tuck away some of the bad stuff. Some people never get it done and that is sad. Taking is one day at a time is best adjunct to pills that I can think of right now. No one has a magic wand that is going wave all the bad stuff away. Clicking your heals three times only makes you look foolish and doesn?t send you back home to as place of where love and happiness over flow like milk and honey.

It takes balls to live with AIDS. It takes time, understanding, and partnering with your health care provider to get from where you are to where you want to be. The journey will not always be smooth. The bumps in the road (did I mention that my left lung collapsed five times post 9/11? Read "My Left Lung" on www.RichardFerri.com if you want so I don't have to do that word dance here.) can sometimes be very harsh, but if you start to build a good foundation you will survive. You may even thrive.

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