Yes, the stigma still exists.

September 23, 2011 By David Weiss

I recently received a Facebook message from an old high school buddy who learned that I have HIV. When I read it, it nearly floored me; after all these years, most Americans, it seems, do not understand HIV. My friend's message and my reply (I've changed his name to protect HIS innocence) follows:

Hi David, Just ordered your book. Seems intriguing. Are you healthy? Is HIV different from having aides? I'm somewhat ignorant at the difference, guess I should look it up. Are you still living in the Phillipines and Sweden? Sounds like you've had and have quite a fulfilling life. Hope all is well. Tom.

Hi Tom, good to hear from you after all these years. I've lived with HIV for 31 years. If untreated, HIV eventually causes AIDS but they are not the same. The former is a virus, while the latter (which actually stands for "Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome") is the collapse of the immune system that occurs when unsuppressed HIV destroys the immune system.

ALL human beings are host to countless bacteria and some carry viruses. The primary difference between HIV and any other human parasite, bacteria or virus is that there is still no absolute cure for it, and despite some progress, remains a killer. Like many other viruses, HIV can be sexually transmitted, although we now know that when the virus is suppressed by proper medication, the risk of transmission is very low. Indeed, there are many serodiscordant couples (where one partner has HIV and the other does not) who have normal, happy, HIV negative children, just as do couples who don't carry HIV..

Notwithstanding the relatively low risk of transmission between one partner with suppressed HIV and one who is HIV negative, most responsible people use condoms, which effectively eliminates the risk of transmission.

I hope that you enjoy the book (which isn't about HIV, by the way) as much as everyone else does. I had great fun writing it and I'm working on a sequel.

I still live abroad and spend most of my time in Sweden, which, unlike the United States, provides effective, almost cost-free medical care to all who live there legally. This, of course, is America's great shame. The U.S. health care system is broken, and its political system is nearly so. Changes have to be made, and they must be made soon.

David

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