

HAPPINESS IS

No 4 Vol 12 December 2010

# VITAL





## from the Editor

WELCOME to the winter edition of Happiness is Vital and sadly my last issue as editor. After being in this seat for the last seven years the time has come for me to move on. When my good friend, Gerry Coy asked me in November 2001 to write a short piece for World AIDS Day, I never expected that I would end up playing a part, for so long, in this small but powerful organisation. I have had the great privilege of working closely with all four managers; first with Nicholas Fenlon, then Orla Irwin and for the last two years, John Flannery. Through the editing of the history of AIDS West, I got to work with Evelyn Stevens, the founder and first manager. I thank them all for the leadership they have shown me in that time.

Fergal was the first editor of the newsletter and showed me the ropes way back then. On behalf of AIDS West I would like to thank him especially for contributing so many

articles right up to the present issue.

There are also many other people who played a huge part in getting each issue published, printed and posted. My thanks to: Marie Noëlle Biddulph who was the first typesetter I worked with, Ness Kelly who regularly provided her unique artwork and Johan Hofsteenge who is the current typesetter. To Eamonn and Mary at Ace Printers who do a fantastic job every quarter, and to all the poets who gave their work freely. To those who contributed articles on a regular basis, especially Dr Shay Keating, Lorraine and Neil who always came up with the goods despite their busy schedules. To Kieran for all that typing he did for me and for Rosaleen and Jo for keeping things running smoothly. A special thank you also to the service users who trusted me with their stories, and to the sponsors of each issue without whom this publication would not see the light of day. Last, but not least to you the reader who has made it all worthwhile.

I know that AIDS West, with its fantastic committed staff, will continue to work

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tirelessly to bring the highest quality care and support to all those who need it. It has been an amazing journey of discovery and learning for me and I am very grateful for the opportunity I have had of being part in this mighty organisation.

Keep well, keep hopeful.

Geraldine Mills

# WORLD AIDS DAY CONCERT

## Galway Joins Impressive List of Global Events

WORLD AIDS DAY events included star-studded events in New York, Washington, Cape Town and Los Angeles. Bono painted the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House red to mark the day. In Galway we did our city proud with a special candlelit concert at St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, which marked the 10th Anniversary of this event. Mayor Michael Crowe spoke from the heart about the importance of the event both locally and globally. People from all walks of life came to remember those who have died from the virus, to support those who are living with it or affected in any way by HIV. This annual event promotes HIV awareness and the work of AIDS West in the community.

The evening was a huge success and many generously gave of their time, resources and talent. We have always been grateful for the support from St Nicholas' Church and must thank Rev Hastings and Catherine Moore-

Temple for making this beautiful church available to us once again. We had a wonderful performance from Galway's own Cois Cladaigh. Our heartfelt gratitude to them, under the musical direction of the ebullient Brendan O' Connor and accompanied by Elena Gekker, Delia Boyce and Sandra Schalks. Their voices filled the church with a beautiful programme.

Dr Evelyn Stevens, Co-founder of AIDS West and member of our board spoke of the early years of the HIV Virus and those who have lost loved ones. Thankfully now, with medical advances, people can live relatively normal lives but the stigma remains as strong as ever. Paula Clarke, a personnel development educator working with AIDS West, addressed the audience on the positive choices we can all make in our lives. Patrick Towers, acting Chairperson of AIDS West closing address was inspiring and rounded off



World Aids Day Launch

what was truly a remarkable evening. Our sincere thanks also to Mayor Michael Crowe, The Dail Bar for providing delicious refreshments, Iain McDonald for photography, the staff of AIDS West and our outstanding volunteers who went above and beyond on the day. Finally, thank you to everyone who attended our special evening despite the severe weather conditions. You made it our best event ever.

# Hurrah for Happiness (*Is Vital*)

OVER THE YEARS that I have been involved in this newsletter, I have found it to benefit me in many ways.

It's been a place where I can feel connected to others living with HIV and to people who care for and support service-users. I often feel that living with HIV is essentially a solitary kind of journey. True, I do get marvelous support from family and close friends, but it still remains for me a very personal, introverted part of my life. That's why it's so valuable to feel as though I am part of a community, a network of people who understand and who care. The newsletter provides for me that connection. It can sometimes be difficult to drop into an organisation or even to pick up the phone. Even where confidentiality is assured and inviolate, it can often be hard to present the HIV side of oneself to others.

Having regular updates of news, educational information, shared stories and queries from

other service-users allows me, albeit in a solitary manner, to feel joined up with something bigger and stronger than myself. It's a powerful feeling. Even though I am not attending the various events, shows or activities that AIDS West are involved with, reading about them still makes me feel a part of it all. That has value for me.

The newsletter has also provided me with a marvelous opportunity to have my voice heard; to tell my story. And I can remain as anonymous as I feel comfortable with.

During the early years of adjusting to a HIV diagnosis, I found (and still continue to find) that for me to describe in written form what I was going through and how it was affecting me was of great therapeutic importance.

Just as in a counselling session, I would have to explain very clearly just exactly which issues were troubling me. And like a good counsellor the blank page would not accept me merely saying that I was feeling anxious. I

would have to set out in detail what that was like for me, what I was thinking and precisely what my anxieties centered around. Also, crucially, outline what was I doing that was helpful. It's not very satisfying to write a long moaning complaint. I get wonderful energy in relating how I have found ways out of the misery and I feel as though I might be assisting someone else who might be in a similar boat.

This process involved my rewriting many drafts as I would look back at what I'd said and think: "Well, no, that's not really what I mean." And I would have to try again. This naturally helped me get it all clearer in my own head. Writing out one's personal story (or even one aspect of it) can certainly be daunting, but it can be wonderfully liberating too.

So, thank you Happiness Is Vital for all that you've been to me.

Fergal

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## THT (Terence Higgins Course) on UNDERSTANDING HIV

UNFORTUNATELY, for various reasons, we had to postpone this home correspondence course (initially scheduled for November 2010) until the new year. New dates are now set for the 23rd and 24th of February, 2011 and we have reduced the fee to €300, which we hope will encourage more people to sign up in these difficult economic times. The first course on 'Understanding HIV' last March was hugely successful and feedback was such that we want to offer this opportunity for others to participate in.

The Certificate in Understanding HIV & AIDS is a qualification offered by THT and City and Guilds through AIDS West, Galway. The qualification is at level 2 of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) from City and Guilds (equivalent to FETAC Level 4). The certificate is relevant to those who work in areas such as social services, health services, prison services, organisations for the homeless, drug support services, residential units or anybody that has

an interest in understanding more about HIV and AIDS.

An initial two day induction workshop will cover the contents of course lectures and materials, followed by three units of distance learning assignments.

1. Transmission and Prevention of HIV/AIDS
2. Stigma and Discrimination in HIV/ AIDS and
3. Management of HIV/ AIDS

Assessment is by means of three written assignments. Participants must complete all three assignments to the required standard to successfully achieve the certificate. If you or someone you know is interested in doing the course please contact [jo@aidswest.ie](mailto:jo@aidswest.ie) or call 091 566266.

# Discuss with *Dr Shay*

## Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C (HCV) is the most common cause of chronic viral infection in the western world. First identified in 1989, at least six genotypes (subtypes) have been identified worldwide but genotype 1 and 3 are commonest in Ireland.

Routine blood testing was unavailable in Ireland before 1991. Since then however, the mode of transmission has been shown to be primarily parenteral (blood to blood), formerly by blood products and recently by intravenous drug use, with needle sharing. The risks of infection by sexual and mother to baby transmission are thought to account for less than 1% and 5% respectively.

HCV infection in the drug using community is widespread with as many as 62 – 80% of intravenous drug users believed to be infected. It represents a major healthcare problem for those involved in the care of drug addicts

Chronic HCV infection is often silent, is frequently discovered only at routine blood testing and is believed to occur in at least 70% of patients infected, 30% are believed to clear the virus without treatment. Most people

infected do not have symptoms in early disease.

Diagnosis of HCV infection depends on a high level of suspicion, coupled with the detection of antibodies to HCV. A diagnosis of chronic hepatitis C can be made by detecting the HCV virus genetic material in the blood (HCV RNA). HCV-RNA positive patients may be referred for liver biopsy to determine the extent of liver damage. Treatment is offered to those with chronic active disease (persistent viraemia).

HCV infection is self-limiting in a percentage of infected individuals. The prognosis in chronic infection varies greatly but it would appear that 30% of patients ultimately develop cirrhosis and disability from end stage liver disease within 30 years. Factors affecting prognosis include age at time of infection, cross addiction with alcohol, co-existing HIV and/or HBV infection and genotype. Intravenous Drug Users are most commonly infected with genotype 1 and this carries the worse prognosis.

Currently, dual therapy with pegylated interferon alpha, and ribavirin appears to be



the most clinically relevant disease modifying agents available. The pegylated interferon is administered subcutaneously once a week and ribavirin is taken orally twice a day. Treatment is genotype dependant, 24 weeks for genotype 3 and 48 weeks for genotype 1. A sustained viral response is documented by a negative HCV-RNA six months after treatment completion. The response rate to treatment with genotype 3 is as high as 80%, approximately twice as effective as with genotype 1. There are new HCV drugs coming on line in the coming months which will improve treatment outcomes for many.

*Dr Shay Keating, Medical Officer and Occupational Health Physician with the Drug Treatment Centre, Dublin.*



## Contribute to Happiness Is Vital

WE WOULD LOVE to hear from you. We are currently looking for articles, images or poetry for the upcoming issues of Happiness Is Vital. Tell us what is going on in your world, articles can be fact or fiction. Informative or inspirational. We welcome images from aspiring or inspiring photographers and your feedback on what you would like to see more of in the newsletter. Email [tracy@aidswest.ie](mailto:tracy@aidswest.ie)

## *iPhone App To Rate Health Services*

A FORMER MINISTER has launched an iPhone application to help patients keep track of their NHS appointments and the services they use. Lord Darzi, who quit as minister in July 2009 hopes people will use the app to rate NHS performance in the same way that they review restaurants, hotels or music online.

'Wellnote' allows patients to enter their medical history, allergies, medications and test results. The files can then be emailed or shown to a doctor for ongoing care or in an emergency. The app can also be used to remind patients of doctors appointments, when to take medication or order prescription refills. Users can anonymously rate NHS services with scores appearing alongside official ratings from the Care Quality Commission.

Although there is currently no plan to launch a similar app in Ireland, it could be a very effective way to get instant measurable feedback from patients across the country, with a view to improving quality of care. Wellnote will help to empower people, giving them an avenue to review and record their healthcare experience, enabling them to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.



## *High Levels of HIV in Women despite blood testing*

A STUDY HAS FOUND that some women may have very high levels of HIV in their genital secretions despite undetectable levels in their blood. This calls into question whether, in women, undetectable means uninfected.

A total of 59 women in a clinic in Rhode Island in the US had their blood and genital viral loads measured repeatedly over the course of a year. They all had an undetectable viral blood viral load (under 75 copies per ml) for over 6 months.

Nearly 4 in 10 women (almost 40%) had at least one visit when HIV was detectable in their genital fluids. At any one study visit an average of 9% of women who had an undetectable viral load in their blood had a viral load above 3,300 copies per ml in their genital fluids. 4 of the study participants (approximately 7%) had at least 2 consecutive visits when HIV was detectable in their genital fluids but not in their blood. The highest genital viral load in a woman with no detectable blood viral load was 648,000 copies per ml at the cervix and 480,000 in the vaginal fluid, enough to be infectious.

While there was a definite correlation between blood plasma viral load and genital viral load, the reverse was not true. Detectable vaginal or cervical HIV was not associated with detectable HIV in blood and did not predict treatment failure.

Researchers stated that the "episodic and unpredictable" nature of genital shedding of HIV may, in women at least, make it difficult to predict how much risk they run of transmitting HIV to partners.

**The Guardian / THT**



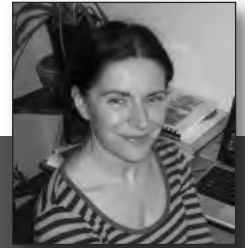
## *First National LGBT Helpline*

IRELAND'S FIRST national LGBT helpline was launched in Dublin on 22 November. This is a national initiative of the seven existing regional LGBT helplines. This is a welcome confidential service which provides access to a network of trained volunteers who provide a non-judgmental listening support and information service for LGBT people as well as their friends and family.

Their official website at [lgbt.ie](http://lgbt.ie) provides a gateway to information and support for LGBT people in Ireland. Volunteers also have information that will be useful for people questioning whether they might be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Call the helpline from 7-9pm Monday through Friday at 1890 929 539.

# Ask Lorraine

Lorraine is here to answer any of your questions in relation to sexual health. If you need a prompt reply to your query please contact our confidential helpline 091-562213



*Dear Lorraine*

*I am 17 years of age and just recently heard from one of my friends that you should wear condoms during oral sex, is this true? I believed you just needed them for penetrative sex. Could you please give me some information on this matter? Confused Cathal.*

**DEAR CATHAL,**

Compared to penetrative sex, oral sex is considered a lower-risk sexual activity. There is zero risk of unwanted pregnancy and a lower chance of passing along a sexually transmitted infection. However, “low risk” does not mean “no risk” – there is no such thing as 100 percent safe sex, and oral sex is no exception.

STIs that can be passed on through oral sex include: chlamydia, herpes (type 1 and type 2, which can cause cold sores around the mouth and on the genitals or anus), genital warts, gonorrhoea and hepatitis B, HIV, and syphilis.

Often, STIs that are transferred through oral sex will have no visible symptoms. A person may be most contagious when they have an active visible infection or sores, but STIs can also be passed while the infected person looks completely healthy. Men can wear a latex condom while receiving oral sex, and women can use a dental dam, which is a thin square of latex that can be placed over the vulva. Dental dams are sold

in some pharmacies, but if one cannot be found, a condom can be cut and unrolled into a square to serve this purpose.

Condoms are available in different flavours, but you can use any kind of condom during oral sex. Make sure that it has the European CE standard mark, which means that the condom meets high safety standards. It's believed that the risk of infection is lower when you receive oral sex than when you give someone oral sex. This is because when someone gives you oral sex, you don't come into contact with your partner's genital fluid (semen or vaginal fluid). However, there's still a risk of infection.

An alternative for monogamous couples may be for both partners to see a health professional and get tested for STI's. It's important to talk to your partner, and make sure that you are both aware that there are still risks: STIs including HIV may not show up in testing until several months after infection. Protection should be used until both partners receive negative test results. If both partners are not completely monogamous, there is still a risk of infection. Condoms are still highly recommended for protection during vaginal and anal sex. I hope this has been of some help Cathal and if you need any further information on any sexual health matters please do not hesitate to contact us here at AIDS West or a good men's health website to check out is [www.menshealth.ie](http://www.menshealth.ie)

**Lorraine**

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## Inspiration through Quotation

*“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”*

Harriet Tubman

*“It was a high counsel that I once heard given to a young person: “Always do what you are afraid to do.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“If you do not hope, you will not find what is beyond your hopes.”*

St. Clement of Alexandria

*“All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes to make it possible.”*

T.E. Lawrence

*“So often times it happens that we live our lives in chains, and we never even know we have the key.”*

Lyrics from Already Gone, performed by the Eagles for their 1974 On the Border album.



# Poetry

by Susan Rich

SUSAN RICH is the author of “The Alchemist’s Kitchen,” “Cures Include Travel,” and “The Cartographer’s Tongue,” winner of the PEN USA Award. She has received awards from the Academy of American Poets, Fulbright Foundation, and Artists Trust. Recent poems appear in the *Antioch Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Poetry Ireland* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

## Awaiting Further Instruction

This is the easy time – a cup of tea,  
mandarins and chocolates.  
Take a millennium and gaze  
over the pine and periwinkle fence line.  
Decipher the cat’s song, the plane’s thrum,  
the soft moans of ink along paper.  
Settle into the sofa with pillows, in book arbor;  
this is you, forty-eight, the day after Thanksgiving.  
The heat up, the rest of life not  
yet beaten into hours, the next thought  
still balanced on the ledge of something  
new – like a doorframe – a place  
for change – if only one could...  
And here is the sky Novembered to a gauzy blue;  
the Olympics flickering a northwest winter truth.  
But what then? When come the afternoons  
of arias; ascendance of the jasmine’s creamy flowers?  
The future self apprised of her red carpet entrance:  
held up – postponed – appearing soon –

## Love in the Time of AIDS

You are afraid  
of a moist toothbrush, disposable razor,  
fearful of the inside  
of your lover’s mouth.  
Too terrified to pose an inquiry in shorthand  
positive, negative?  
You imagine your date’s response  
*I don’t know.*  
Remembering the scent of one man  
the fingertips of another  
triggers the inevitable moment  
when your eyes  
search this new body, stop  
and check for signs –  
like a pilot before the flight  
records temperature and distance  
knowing even this cannot ensure a safe journey.

The lovers he’s had before  
are now your lovers  
and yours are his  
their health and habits as migratory  
as your own blood.

In the morning  
you telephone for the test  
anonymously. No way to study or plan.  
The voice at the end of the line  
gives you the number you will use  
as your identity, sets a time and place  
where you meet a man named Manuel.  
No hint of this, no mark  
will mar your records.

You bargain with yourself.  
You’ll give up kissing –  
no more dancing  
of tongues. You promise to become  
a condom connoisseur. Take six-month tests  
for HIV as if they were multiple choice.  
As if the pilot knows whether or not the plane  
will crash or glide across the sky,  
as if the sky knows what is written underneath the skin.

## For Sale

Xhosa woman in clothes too light  
for the weather have brought wild flowers  
and sit sloped along the Claremont road.  
I see her through rolled windows,  
  
watch her watch me to decide if I’ll pay.  
It’s South Africa, after all, after apartheid;  
but we’re still idling here, my car to her curb,  
my automatic locks to her inadequate wage.

# Unusual Christmas Traditions

CHRISTMAS SEASON is something that is enjoyed in almost all parts of the world and each country has their own set of traditions; here are just a few of the more unusual ones.

In the Czech Republic, young ladies who dream of marriage have a very unusual Christmas tradition. On Christmas Eve, these hoping to be a bride in the coming year, will stand with their back to the house. Next they will throw one of their shoes over their shoulder towards the door. If the shoe lands with the heel towards the door, then she will remain unmarried for another year. If the toe of the shoe points towards the door, she is believed to marry before the next Christmas. She will begin making her wedding preparations and move out of her parent's house immediately. At Christmas Eve dinner, the head of the family takes a good sized spoonful of a special traditional Christmas dish made from bread poppy seed filling and water. This is called Loksa. Loksa is thrown up to the ceiling to see how much of the mixture will stick to the ceiling. The more that sticks, the better the crops will be in the year ahead. This is a tradition that is followed throughout Slovakia and the Ukraine. It provides great family amusement except possibly for the person who has to clean up the mess.

Belgium enjoys two Santa Claus figures. There is St. Nicholas (who visits those who speak the Walloon language) and Pere Noel (who visits those who speak French) and is accompanied by his companion Pere Fouettard. The first visit is on 4th December when he checks to see if children have been good or bad. He returns on December 6th with presents for the good children and twigs left inside shoes or in a small basket left inside the doorway for the bad children.

In many countries the people attend mass either Christmas eve or Christmas day. This is also true in Caracas Venezuela with one exception; everybody roller skates to mass. It is such a big traditional event that all the roads within the city are closed to traffic. It's a great alternative to ice skating because the climate is just too warm for snow or ice.



In Bulgaria a main tradition is "soorooachka" whereby children with a specially prepared handmade patting stick, pat their family, friends and visitors on Christmas Eve whilst saying a wish for health, wealth and happiness. Bulgarians give the child money at the end of the patting which they believe is their way of buying success for the coming year. The main celebration meal is held Christmas Eve at the home of the oldest grandparent. Hay is placed under the dinner table in respect of and to remind the family of the manger. The Christmas Eve dinner table which consists of 7-11 dishes, is not cleared until the next morning. This is a tradition which they believe will ensure there will be plenty of food for the coming year.

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## Overwhelming Feedback on our Newsletter

GIVEN THE INEVITABLE cutbacks that are expected in all areas and the pressures for funding on our sponsors, we at AIDS West had been giving serious thought as to whether to continue with our Newsletter "Happiness is Vital". We asked a sample of our readers, service users and friends whether we should continue and the answer was a definite YES. We then decided

to go further and conduct a survey of all the doctors' surgeries in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon to get their feedback. We asked whether they wanted to continue receiving the publication and if they found it useful to them, their patients and their surgeries. An overwhelming 86% of approximately 300 doctors said they definitely wanted to continue receiving it.

We are encouraged by this. So much so, that for 2011 it is our objective to continue the publication which is Ireland's only HIV focused newsletter. It continues to bring happiness to so many because after all we truly believe that Happiness IS Vital. So we will continue to invite possible funders, sponsorship, contributors and ideas, which can improve the newsletter in any way.

# Study confirms effectiveness of early treatment

A STUDY PUBLISHED at the Tenth International Congress on Drug Therapy in HIV Infection in Glasgow has found that patients who started antiretroviral combination therapy (cART) within the first year of diagnosis were 36% less likely to experience treatment failure, and 65% less likely to develop HIV drug resistance on treatment, than patients in general. This came from a study by CASCADE (Concerted Action from Seroconversion to AIDS and Death in Europe) and includes patients with a known date of known HIV infection in 13 countries. The study included 1,223 patients who had started cART less than a year after seroconversion. Of those who participated, 85% were male with a median age of 34. Their average CD4 count at the start of therapy was 432. In terms of time to virological failure, four years after the start of therapy 11% had

experienced failure and 3% had confirmed drug resistance. Eight years after the start of therapy, 18% had failed treatment and 6% had confirmed drug resistance. These figures are lower than a study by Cozzi-Lepri which showed a 27% failure and a 17% drug resistance after eight years. Study presenter Sarah Lodi confirmed that most failures happened in the first two years of treatment. The older people were when their treatment began, the less likely they were to fail treatment. There was a 30% less treatment failure for every decade of age. There was also an 8% less failure and a 26% less drug resistance for every 100 cell increase in CD4 count at the start of treatment. Patients who had taken unboosted protease inhibitor regimens were nearly three times (192%) more likely to have failed treatment than patients with other treatment histories.

## New Test Offers PHONE DIAGNOSIS

A REVOLUTIONARY new plan has begun in the UK to cut the rate of infection among young people. Denis Campbell, Health Correspondant in The Guardian reports that mobile phones and computers will soon be able to diagnose sexually transmitted diseases including herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhoea. Doctors are joining forces with technology experts to develop small devices, similar to pregnancy testing kits, that will tell someone quickly and privately if they have caught an infection through sexual contact. A sample of urine or saliva is placed on a computer chip which is then plugged into your home computer or phone and a diagnosis is received within minutes.

The Medical Research Council has given a four million pound grant to develop the technology. Sexual health experts have welcomed the news in the hope that it will help to reduce the growing rate of STI's which have increased for the last decade and reached a record 482,696 last year. Two-thirds of women reporting a new STI were under 25, as were more than half of men.

Regardless of age, most are too embarrassed to visit a GP or medical clinic to get tested, thereby going without treatment and potentially passing the disease to others. To make the test as accessible and anonymous as possible, developers are hoping to make it available via vending machines in nightclubs, pharmacies and supermarkets. They expect the final product to cost under one pound.

The Guardian / THT



## High Times 6

# High Times with NEIL WILSON

IN THE FILM “51<sup>st</sup> State”, Samuel L Jackson plays the role of an American chemist called Elmo McElroy who claims to have designed a new recreational drug. The plot revolves around the sale of a vast quantity of the new drug to the drug lords of Liverpool. Later in the comedy-thriller it is revealed that ‘POS 51’ is in fact no more than a placebo with all the active ingredients cancelling each other out – making this ‘the most expensive candy in the world’. The main effect of the ‘drug’ is as a powerful laxative, which in the end dispenses with the gangster known at ‘The Lizard’, played by Meatloaf.

‘POS’ stands for ‘Power of Suggestion’ and that in itself is a powerful force. If people believe that something is going to work they may well be convinced that it does – for them. In recent weeks the same force can be seen at work in the reported craze for ‘Digital Drugs’. These are downloadable tracks played through stereo headphones that claim to replicate the effects of anything from heroin to an orgasm. Whilst music can certainly affect your mood and heart rate this “white noise” available from such outlets at the cheekily-named ‘i-doser’ has been ridiculed by the vast majority of scientific opinion. This still hasn’t dissuaded many customers from downloading tracks such as ‘Gate of Hades’ (at 199 dollars) and putting the results on ‘YouTube’.

The power and reach of the internet has given a new lease of life to a number of quite old hoaxes. Generations of American parents have had letters (and nowadays e-mails) claiming that temporary tattoos are being distributed

to the local schoolchildren soaked in LSD, with the aim of making them addicted to the substance. There has never been a documented case of this actually happening. Another variation of this hoax is the ‘Burindanga business card’. The claim goes that people are passed business cards in isolated locations, such as remote gas stations. The drug then overpowers them so it becomes easy to steal from them. The drug does actually exist, and is better known as Scopolamine, but it is impossible to ingest it via a business card! Some say that Scopolamine itself was investigated by the C.I.A (in the 1950’s) for its possible use as a ‘truth drug’. Long used by witches, sorcerers and shamans in South America as a ‘Flying Ointment’, it is also recognized as the device by which Dr. Crippen dispensed with his wife.

Sometimes professionals hear about a ‘new drug’ and do what they feel is the right thing at the time by informing others. The problem is that they can be made to look quite foolish afterwards. This clearly happened to the writer of the ‘Collier County Sheriffs Office Bulletin’ in 2007. This obscure and no doubt little-read publication soon got beamed around the internet when it told people to be on their guard against a new homemade drug called ‘Jentem’. The report said that Jentem was made from human urine and faeces which had been allowed to ferment in a bottle with a balloon covering the opening. Inhaling the released methane gas from the balloon led to ‘a euphoric high similar to ingesting cocaine, but with strong hallucinations of times past’.



The prize for perhaps the most persistent myth, hoax or urban legend must however go to the drug ‘Bananadine’. Claims that you can get high from smoking banana skins and having an LSD type of experience from it have been around since 1967 when the street newspaper ‘The Berkeley Barb’ (sold in a similar way to ‘The Big issue’) tried to get bananas banned by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) as a way of highlighting the drugs issue. The song ‘Mellow Yellow’ was recorded by the singer Donovan some months beforehand and many imagined that he was referring to this. It no doubt helped to further popularize the urban myth. The song itself is about his experience with a bout of hepatitis (which causes jaundice), although Donovan himself sometimes claimed that the line ‘mellow yellow’ was in fact written about a banana shaped vibrator. Rather oddly, the phrase ‘mellow yellow’ seems to have been first used by our own James Joyce in ‘Ulysses’. When speaking about Mrs. Molly Bloom’s buttocks he says “He kissed the plump mellow yellow melons of her rump.”

The power of suggestion indeed.

**Neil Wilson**

*Drugs/alcohol/sexual health co-ordinator*

# USEFUL SERVICES

## AIDS WEST

Sexual Health Helpline 091-562213

## STI Clinic Galway

091-525200

## STI Clinic Portlincula

Hospital, Ballinasloe 09096-48372

## STI Clinic Mayo

General Hospital, Castlebar, Co Mayo 09490-21733

## STI Clinic Sligo

Regional Hospital, The Mall, Sligo 071-9170473

## STI Clinic Cork

021 4966131 Appointment only

Infectious Diseases Clinical Nurses Specialists

Cork University Hospital

087 236124/0876996272

## STI Clinic Limerick

Limerick Regional Hospital, Dooradoyle 061-482382

## G.U.I.D.E. Clinic Dublin

St. James' Hospital 01-4162315/2316

## Infectious Disease Clinic

Beaumont Hospital 01-8093006

## Open Heart House

Contact James or Paul at 01-8305000

## AIDS Help Northwest

Letterkenny, Co Donegal 074-9125500

## Red Ribbon Project

9 Cecil Street, Limerick. Helpline: 061-316661

## Sexual Health Centre

16 Peters' Street, Cork, 021-4276676

## Dublin AIDS Alliance

53 Parnell Square West, Dublin 1. 01-8733799

## ACET

14 Lower O'Connell St, Dublin 1. 01-8787700

dublin@acet.ie www.acet.ie

## STI Clinic Waterford, Clonmel, Carlow

Tel: 051-842646 for all appointments.

## The HIV Support Centre

The Warehouse, 3rd Floor, 7 James' Street South,

Belfast BT28DN. Tel: 02890249268

info@thehivsupportcentre.org.uk

*If you would like your organisation to be included in our list of useful services please phone, email, or contact us at the address below.*

AIDS WEST is a voluntary organisation based in Ozanam House, St Augustine Street, Galway, providing support for people affected by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and offering education / prevention services throughout the HSE West area (Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon). The organisation can be contacted in confidence by phoning; 091-566266 (Office); 091-562213 (Helpline). E-mail: info@aidswest.ie Website: www.aidswest.ie

## The STI Clinic Opening Hours

DAY	CLINIC	TIME
Mon afternoon	Walk-in Clinic	Doors open 13.50 No appt needed
Mon afternoon	STI review and Treatment clinic	By appt only
Weds morning	Walk-in Clinic	Doors open 8.50
Weds afternoon	Walk-in Clinic	Doors open 13.50
Fri morning	STI screening and treatment clinic	By appt only

Walk-in clinic operates on a 'first come first served basis', with a maximum quota that can be seen at any one time. The clinic is located in a self-contained building to left of main hospital. As you enter grounds of the hospital, take first left, follow signs for Genito-urinary Medicine Clinic, Infectious Diseases and hepatology- in front of maternity services. Tel 091-525200

## AIDS WEST HELPLINE

# 091-562213

*Wishing a happy and safe Christmas and New Year to you all.*

Deadline for our next issue is 15th January, 2011. Send to: info@aidswest.ie or The Editor, Happiness is Vital, AIDS West, Ozanam House, St. Augustine St. Galway.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily express the views or policies of AIDS West.

We reserve the right to edit where necessary.

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# World Aids Day



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