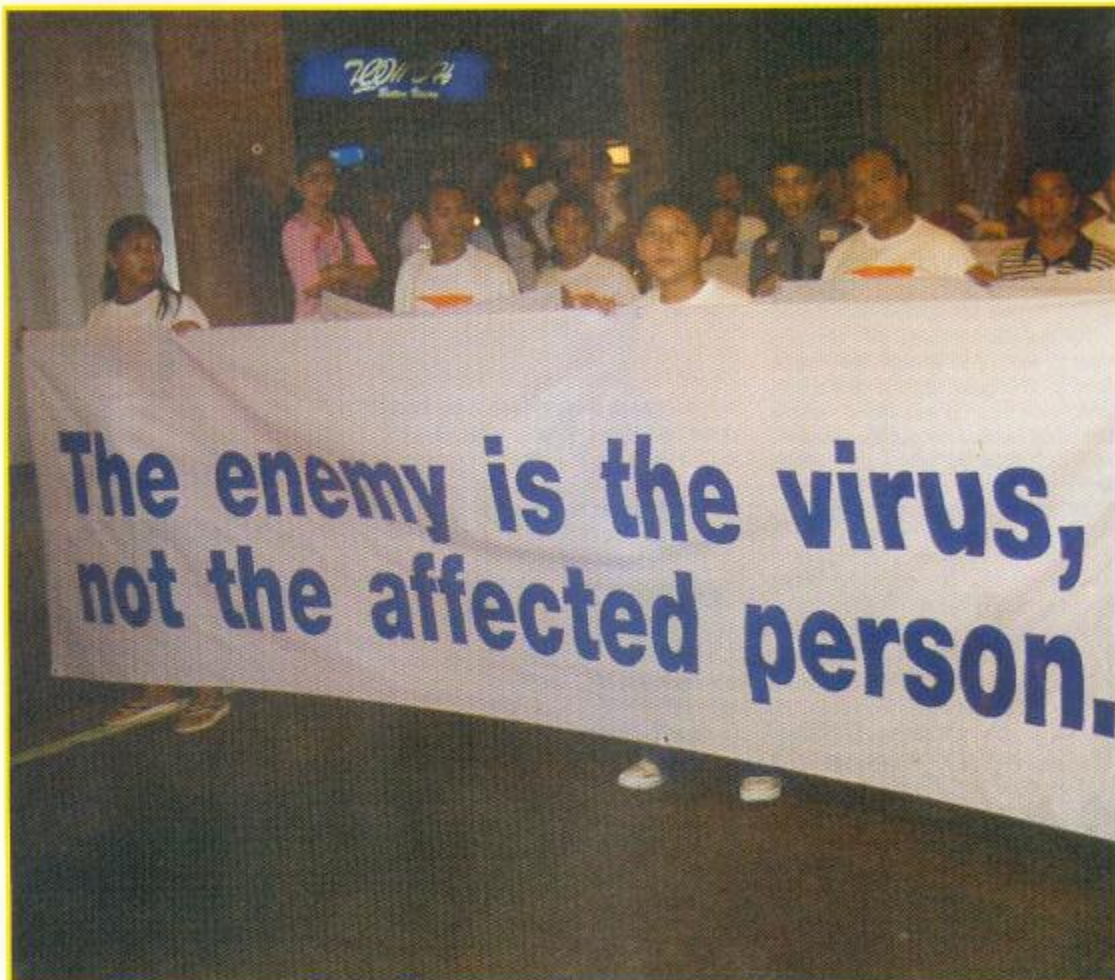


HAPPINESS IS VITAL



Quarterly Newsletter of AIDS WEST ©

NO.1 VOL 7 MARCH 2005



**Don't forget
Irish AIDS Day
on 15th June**

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another year and another issue of Happiness is Vital. I have been noticing how the days are lengthening in the last few weeks. Light has come into our mornings and there is a fine long stretch in the evenings. We are being enlightened by spring. It makes me think how great it would be if this enlightenment spread into the hearts and minds of people; that they could stretch themselves like a spring day into acceptance of those with HIV and AIDS. Maybe they could take a leaf out of Nelson Mandela's book. The former South African president spoke out openly about his son Makgatho who died recently from AIDS. He said that "HIV and AIDS should be treated by society as nothing more than illnesses and there should be no social stigma associated with them." What Nelson Mandela said struck a chord with the British MP Chris Smith. This gave him the courage to announce that he has led a healthy life since he was diagnosed with HIV in 1987. Twenty years ago Smith

announced at a meeting in Rugby, Warwickshire that he was gay and was given a standing ovation for coming out. And his openness didn't harm him in the polls either. His recent announcement about his HIV status led to a phone call from the Prime Minister Tony Blair to congratulate him on his courage. As a result of his openness he is likely to be enlisted as a campaigner by Chancellor Gordon Brown in his bid to win more resources from wealthy countries to fight AIDS in the developing world. One of the important things Smith said in his interview with The Times was "HIV still leads to too much injustice. Let's take a lead from Mandela and face that injustice (and the ignorance and prejudice that give rise to it) head on." Maybe more people will be inspired by these men and 2005 may see a forward movement in people's perception of the illness.

ED

AIDS West is a voluntary organisation based in Ozanam House, St. Augustine Street, Galway.

Support for people affected by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and education /prevention services are offered throughout the Western Health Board area (counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon).

The organisation can be contacted in confidence by phoning; 091-566266 (office) or 091-562213 (helpline)

Fax on 091-564708 or e-mail: aidswest@iol.ie

website: www.aidswest.ie



USEFUL SERVICES - USEFUL SERVICES - USEFUL SERVICES

AIDS West

Sexual Health Helpline 091-562213

STI Clinic Galway

091-525200 by appointment only

STI Clinic Portluncula

Hospital, Ballinasloe 09096-48372

STI Clinic Mayo

General Hospital, Castlebar, Co Mayo 09490-21733

STI Clinic Sligo

Regional Hospital, The Mall, Sligo 071-9170473

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

St.James' Hospital 01-4162315/2316
Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 01-8093000

Open Heart House.

Contact James or Paul at 01- 8305000

AIDS HELP NORTH WEST

Letterkenny, Co.Donegal 074-9125500

Red Ribbon Project,

9 Cecil St. Limerick. Helpline 061-316661

Alliance Sexual Health Centre,

16 Peters St. Cork 021-4276676

Dublin AIDS Alliance

53 Parnell Square West Dublin 1 Tel.01-8733799

STI Clinic Waterford, Clonmel, Carlow

Tel. 051-842646 for all appointments.

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

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Deadline for all your articles, poems, photos for the next issue is 5th May 2005. Send to: The Editor, Happiness is Vital, AIDS West, Ozanam House, St. Augustine St. Galway.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of AIDS West. We reserve the right to edit where necessary.

POSITIVE INPUT and the Gare St.Lazare Players Theatre Company have made a successful application to the Cork 2005 Euro Capital of Culture to develop and produce a theatre piece based on the realities of living with HIV in Cork. HIV+ people will participate in the play.

THROUGH THE GOOD AND THE DARK TIMES



Five years ago I was diagnosed with the HIV virus. It came completely out of the blue and I couldn't believe (nor take in) what the hospital counsellor was saying to me. I had gone into hospital with a completely different health issue, but because of the nature of my work I was asked if I would have an HIV test just to rule it out. I agreed knowing in my heart that I never used drugs, wasn't gay nor bisexual and I was completely faithful to my wife. The counsellor came back the next day and broke the news. Thinking back I just remember the panic I felt and how I was unable to speak. A knock came to the door of my room and my wife walked in. Seeing the state I was in she asked what was wrong. I told her I was HIV positive. She threw her arms around me and we cried and cried. We realised then that she needed to be tested too. The next 24 hours were the longest and hardest hours we ever had to go through. I still had other serious health problems but I couldn't let my wife home on her own. So I went with her, returning to the hospital the next day. Walking down the corridor we met a close friend who was coming to visit me. He was totally unaware of what we were going

through but my wife and I looked at one another saying 'we'll tell him'. He was so supportive and to this day is one of the few very close friends we have told. My wife's test came back negative and again the tears flowed. After this we both knew we needed help and we went through a year of counselling. I went to the psychologist, while my wife attended the hospital counsellor.

Now five years on, understanding and knowing more about the virus and the treatments involved, we are living life to the full. We have each other to share our feelings with. We are honest with and trust each other without thinking about it. We love each other and we are the best of friends.

It is important that we, the people living with the virus learn to share our feelings with each other, learn how to accept and be at

peace with ourselves. In the larger cities it is easy to attend meetings and clinics and still feel anonymous. In smaller towns and rural areas there is very little support and people often feel alone and isolated. I have set up a good support system for myself. I have an understanding doctor, nurse in the surgery, dentist and community nurse. These professionals know that I am positive and my wife is negative. We are assured of their confidentiality and that gives us great peace of mind.

It was not easy going to speak to these people at first. To be honest it was my wife who went to the doctor and explained everything to him. After seeing how supportive and understanding he and his team were, I then had the confidence to visit the other medical people. I must not close without saying a few things. My faith helped me and continues to help me every day. I believe it is important to give ourselves time each day to reflect and find peace within ourselves. This inner peace can be found through God or whatever Greater Being a person believes in. My wife knows I am writing this. I want to tell her how much I love her and to thank her for being with me through the dark days. We will continue to love and support each other through the good and dark times of our lives. And finally, remember there is no need to feel alone. Find someone to confide in and build friendships around yourself because sharing is a very healthy and positive feeling.

JUST A NOTE

Just a note to say hello
To let you know I love you so
It doesn't matter if you're gay or straight
HIV knows every gate,
But don't be afraid, it's never too late
To look for support from all your mates
And not to worry about hate
Because you're positive or you've got AIDS.

We're here, all 40 million plus of us
That's what makes us great.
Black and white, gay or straight
Never look back, it's never too late.

TOMAS (HIV POSITIVE FOR 20 YEARS)

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS

THE JURY IS STILL OUT ON WHETHER THE NEW STRAIN OF HIV IN NEW YORK IS A SCIENTIFIC ODDITY OR PUBLIC HEALTH MENACE.

The recent announcement that "a rapidly progressive and highly resistant strain of HIV" had been diagnosed for the first time in a city resident has led to different opinions from leading experts. The case was found in an unidentified man in his 40's who had multiple partners and unprotected anal sex, often while using crystal methamphetamine. Officials said that the man developed AIDS as early as 2-3 months and no more than 20 months after infection.

According to the health department, the strain was resistant to three of the four classes of AIDS drugs and the concern was compounded by the fast onset of the disease. Even though the discovery prompted city health officials to announce an alert, leading experts said that there may be little cause for alarm. Dr. Robert Gallo, director of the University of Maryland's Institute of Human Virology and co-discoverer of HIV told Reuters that "there is absolutely no evidence that this is a super virus."

There is also no evidence that the virus is readily transmissible and there is also uncertainty over whether the bug detected is really a single, highly resistant strain of HIV, or possibly many subtypes of the virus in the same patient- each resistant to some drugs but not all.

The crucial question is whether the aggressive case of AIDS suffered by the New York patient is the result of something new about the virus, or is specific to the patient due to his genetics or to behaviour that made him vulnerable.

Details of the report announced by prominent New York AIDS researcher, Dr. David Ho describe the patient becoming very sick very quickly after binges of unprotected sex and methamphetamines. Ho said that there is ample evidence that methamphetamines use is associated with riskier, unprotected

sexual activity, a phenomenon called disinhibition. There is no evidence he said that the drug itself makes the immune system more vulnerable to infection.

Genetic sequencing of the patient's virus has shown it does not match any known strain of HIV contained in a massive database of viral strains maintained at Los Alamos National Laboratories. Only a few genetic changes are necessary, however to define a new strain.

San Francisco AIDS physician Stephen Deeks said in an interview that he believes that "host factors" i.e. the traits of the patient rather than the virus, are almost certainly the cause of his rapid deterioration in the face of a multi-drug resistant virus. However, he said the case still underscores the danger of unsafe sex in an environment populated by a still dangerous virus.

COURTESY OF SFGATE.COM

BRITAIN'S FORMER CULTURE SECRETARY ANNOUNCES HE IS HIV POSITIVE

Chris Smith the British MP who was Secretary of State for Culture between 1997 and 2001 revealed recently that he has been living with HIV for 17 years.

Mr. Smith, who was also the first member of Parliament to reveal that he is gay, back in 1984, was diagnosed HIV positive in 1987 and attributes his survival to early diagnosis, early antiretroviral treatment and high quality care in the national health. Mr. Smith told The Times that he didn't consider it necessary to disclose his HIV status to Prime Minister Tony Blair when he was appointed to the cabinet and only told Mr. Blair a few weeks ago. "I didn't feel the need to tell people except for a very, very few as it was not in any way affecting my work." Mr. Smith decided to make a public statement about his HIV status following the disclosure by Nelson Mandela that his son had died from AIDS. Mr. Smith didn't know what the response to his disclosure might

be but as he said in the interview, "I hoped that saying something may help to demystify the issue of HIV, to counter the prejudice and lack of knowledge that does exist and help move things forward a bit." He hopes that by revealing his condition, it will give hope to others with HIV that they too can live a normal life.

SYPHILIS OUTBREAK IN THE US

A UK based team of researchers has found that regular epidemics of syphilis in the USA are due to the intrinsic cyclical nature of the disease. They show that changes in the immunity of the population cause periodic syphilis outbreaks, rather than changes in sexual behaviour as was previously thought. According to this research in a January issue of Nature, the team suggests that the syphilis outbreaks, previously attributed to social phenomena such as sexual revolution or the gay liberation movement, are actually caused by a loss of immunity among those at risk of infection. Dr Nicholas Grassly, from the Imperial College London and one of the researchers, said, "While we do not dispute the fact that syphilis is transmitted by unsafe sex, our findings suggest that change in population immunity is the main reason for periodic epidemics of syphilis, not change in sexual behaviour."

COURTESY OF AIDSMAP

SOLUTION TO WINTER WORDSEARCH



THIS & THAT



DID YOU KNOW THAT

* Retroviruses are so called because they reverse the usual flow of genetic information within the host cell in order to reproduce themselves. HIV is a retrovirus. Viruses are parasitic agents that consist solely of a strip of genetic material within a protein coat. They live inside the cells of their host animal or plant and can reproduce themselves only by forcing the host cell to make viral copies.

* The earliest known case of AIDS was in an African man who died in 1959. Scientists looked at 1213 blood samples that were gathered in Africa between 1959 and 1982. They found clear signs of the virus in a sample taken from a Bantu man who lived in what is now called Kinshasa, Republic of Congo.

* It has been estimated that about 3% of those infected with HIV will never progress to AIDS. Non progressors as they are called, all have one thing in common i.e. a functional squad of memory T4 or CD4+ cells that respond to the HIV infection. Such people have an immune system that remembers HIV and controls it over time.

Autonomy

I now know
And I know this very well,
I'm responsible for my own happiness
Or I can choose to live in hell.

I now know
That the sunshine and the breeze
Are little gifts the Lord has sent
To set my mind at ease.

I now know
A good swim or long walk
Will ease the worst of heartaches
And enable me to talk.

I now know
That complaining isn't gainful
And change is very painful
But it's worth it,
That I know.

DENISE HENEGHAN

Mad Heaven Sends a Thread to Earth

Mad heaven sends a thread to earth
Cobwebs and spiders catch the flies
That scout about the eternities.

Time flies. You cannot
Its flight has no existence
My grandad said, and I a child,
Could not understand the conundrum.

But mad heaven sends a thread to earth
And its wild flight gives something birth.
Cobwebs and spiders catch the flies
That scout about the eternities.

Dancing in the Dawn

In the dim recesses
Seedlings germinate,
Push a little upwards in the dark,
Stretch forth tendrils,
Reach out for air and light and living,
Call out for actualisation, for being.

Two big panes of glass
In two plain timber frames
Open in,
And there within,
The forest paths of Namia:
Dappled shade and air and light for life;
Woman dreaming, waking, dancing in
The dawn.

DENISE HENEGHAN

POSITIVE INPUT

A new forum for HIV positive people is currently in the process of being set up. POSITIVE INPUT aims to act as a forum for HIV positive people and to address their issues of concern by organising regional and national meetings. So far regional committees have been formed in Cork, Limerick and Galway while regional representatives are being nominated to work in a voluntary capacity for the forum. POSITIVE INPUT welcomes all people with HIV whether they are employed or unemployed. It is for students, lone parents, gay people, couples or families of any culture. We hope to establish a person-with-AIDS led support group in the same way as any person living with a serious long term medical condition does.

All are welcome to contribute their suggestions and concerns at meetings. The initial get-togethers will be informal discussions to gather information on areas of most concern whether it is welfare, health or treatment. We hope to make news-sheets available through the clinics and conduct a survey at a later stage. This effort is supported by the Red Ribbon Project in Limerick, Alliance in Cork and AIDS West, Galway. A small fund has been made available to cover the cost of booking rooms, paying travel costs and refreshments.

If you would like to get involved or would like more information please contact me, Julianna Kenny (regional representative) : 0861034930 or e-mail: anna_kern22@hotmail.com.

You can also contact Gerry Coy Support Service Co-ordinator at AIDS West 091-566266

Book Review



A Woman's Guide to Living with HIV Infection.

John Hopkins University Press Health Book. 314 pages

This book is a dense factual clinical guide and reference tome for HIV positive women and HIV counsellors, so you will have to like your reading. There are pages of very small print, no diagrams or pictures but there is an abundance of tables and lists - very, very useful ones that you can photocopy and keep or pass to a female friend as fact-sheets. There is plenty of general female medical information and it is also worthwhile for life partners to have a read.

The book is divided into five main chapter sections.

- Part One "Adjusting to life with HIV" is concerned with the strategies of coping, explaining to children, looking for services and what to expect.
- Part Two "Meeting the Challenges of HIV Infection" is a very practical chapter with plenty of sub sections covering all the important topics such as choosing a HIV medication regimen and learning about side effects and what causes them.
- Part Three "Sexual and Gynaecological Health" - deals with pelvic infections, unsafe sex, preventing HIV transmission in the home and so on.
- Part Four "Reproduction" considers pregnancy, timing ovulation, birth control, pelvic pain and topics such as when only one partner is HIV Positive.
- Part Five "Taking Care of Yourself, Special Considerations" covers some serious issues such as abusive relationships and what to do about drug addiction and treatment, planning for the future and taking control.

There are plenty of headings within each sub section so you can easily skip to the parts most relevant to you and take notes, without ploughing through pages of medical jargon or discussion. If you don't always understand a word, check the back of the book as there is a good glossary of terms, names and an alphabetical index. If you really want more information, a resource guide to websites and other literature is included. There is also a sample

tracking sheet for medications, tests and vaccinations where you can keep a record of prescribed medication you are taking.

Here are some pages worth looking at-

P 25: *How to have the most productive clinic visit (in 10 solid steps).*

P104: *Risk factors for sexual transmission of HIV to uninfected partners.*

P 82/83: *Class-based regimens recommended / treatments to avoid for ARV naive patients.*

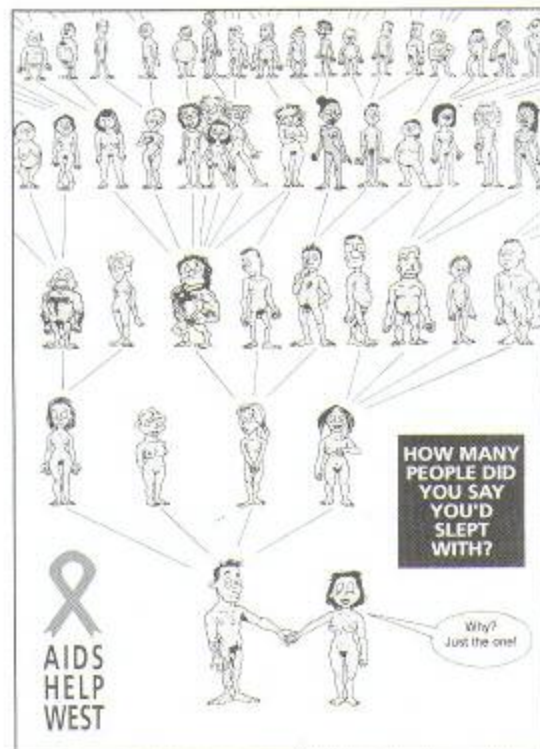
P 157: *HIV treatments for pregnant women with HIV, without symptoms.*

P165: *Factors that influence menstrual cycles.*

I put 'A Woman's Guide' down and picked it up a dozen times during the week; it's such a chunky read. I like this book; it talks to you and is very educational on many, many topics: breast health, bone health, heart health, mental health, HIV and hepatitis, HIV and depression. It always gives you the options on treatment, care and medication. One draw back is that it is an American publication and therefore much of the information relates to the U.S. in terms of medication, addresses, prices etc.

However it does make an admirable attempt to walk in the shoes of the HIV positive woman and feel what she is feeling. It prompts questions and teases answers in order to identify challenges and difficulties the reader may have.

JULIANNA KENNY



SIMPLE BREATH



When we are born, if we don't take the first vital breath, we don't live and when the life has gone out of our bodies, the last breath is drawn. So breath is the thread that connects life and death. When you look at a healthy newborn baby sleeping in its cot, its breath is effortless and yet as we grow older, we somehow manage to unlearn the proper use of it. Breath is life and we have been known to treat it very badly.

In tense situations, instead of using the breath to its utmost, we hold it back. When we are stretching our bodies physically, instead of breathing into the stretch, we hold it back again. We are brought up to believe that the breath is held in our lungs but it really travels all over the body if we do not restrict it. Have you ever sat in a dentist's chair waiting for the drill to hit your mouth, your eyes shut tight, in case you see the drill coming at you, your hands are held in a tight fist and your body is rigid? You forget to breathe. Apart from the dentist's chair there are other stressful situations where we need to use the breath to deal with the fearful moment without placing permanent damage on our bodies.

You may have read various articles about how to use the breath effectively and you try so hard to get it right, that you have placed yourself in another stressful situation. Don't try to do it, just do it.

Why not try this simple exercise. Breathe in through your nose, feel the breath travel down through your shoulders, your chest, your stomach and into your abdomen. Fill your whole body with the breath and allow your stomach and abdomen to extend. When you feel all the crevices have been filled with the breath, let it travel back up through your stomach, your chest, your neck and out through your mouth. Keep your shoulders relaxed; it is important that they are not tensed. Don't beat yourself up by trying too hard. Try this exercise a few times a day to get the hang of it. With repetition, it becomes natural and next time you are in a stressful situation, try to bring the breath to the part of your body that is under pressure, whether it be through pain or just anxiety.

If you have a Yoga or a Pilate's class near you, sign up. Don't worry about the complicated postures; not everyone started with their knees behind their ears. Both of these classes, if properly run, will concentrate on the breath, which is the vital part of any posture. When the breath has been mastered, the postures can be perfected.

Happy Breathing

TML

SPRING WORDSEARCH

CLUES

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| (1) Human | (8) Treatment |
| (2) Virus | (9) Immune |
| (3) Epidemic | (10) Deficiency |
| (4) Syphilis | (11) Acquired |
| (5) Chlamydia | (12) Herpes |
| (6) Therapy | (13) Transmission |
| (7) HAART | (14) Warts |
| | (15) AIDS |
| | (16) HIV |



