Editor’s Letter Spring 2009

A Call to Action

February 27, 2009 By Kate Ferguson

As a health reporter, who is also an African-American woman, rising rates of HIV/AIDS are a fact of life to me. I work with the statistics, speak to people who live with the disease, attend HIV/AIDS conferences, write stories about the subject and live with the knowledge that I am 23 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than a white woman.

At the age of 23, I took my first HIV test. I was driven to know my status when I learned my husband had died in jail of AIDS. Twenty years later, I took the test again. This time I was engaged to be married. I’d discovered that my husband-to-be had been cheating. Fortunately, I was lucky. I tested negative both times. Like a multitude of other women, I’d cloaked myself in a false sense of security because I was involved in relationships I thought were monogamous. I’d absolved my partners of using condoms, surrendered my power in the relationship and had been caught napping.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic touches all our lives in many different ways. Whether directly or indirectly, it’s a fact that African Americans are currently the hardest hit group by HIV/AIDS. Thousands of new HIV infections each year occur mostly among young people of color.

Despite the rising infection rate, however, the past eight years have seen a dramatic reversal of much of what HIV/AIDS activists had accomplished. For African Americans in particular, this trend has proved catastrophic. HIV/AIDS continues to ravage our people; loved ones are still dying; those with HIV are still stigmatized; and AIDS is still the leading cause of death for black women ages 24 to 34. In fact, 65 percent of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses among women in the United States are black, but many of us remain in denial about the necessity to educate and arm ourselves to fight this disease.

Now we have an opportunity to regroup and battle the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In 1983, a group of people with AIDS launched a self-empowerment movement by forming the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) and writing a historic manifesto titled The Denver Principles. Today, NAPWA is launching a massive new effort called The Denver Principles Project to recommit to the original principles and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The initiative is a call to action to all of us to join forces and help save lives. The Denver Principles

Project aims to increase NAPWA's membership, which in turn will bolster its power in Washington, DC, as an effective community advocate on behalf of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and those committed to stopping the spread of the disease.

The initiative asks that you join NAPWA and/or donate to The Denver Principles Project. All donations will be used to sponsor memberships in NAPWA for anyone with HIV who cannot afford the $35 membership dues. The names of individuals, organizations or companies supporting the project will appear in the May 2009 15th anniversary issue of POZ magazine, Real Health's sister publication.

At Real Health, we are committed to revitalizing the AIDS movement in America by supporting NAPWA's Denver Principles Project. We are confident that the campaign can effectively address the crisis in black America. With your donations and support, you can help us succeed in ripping off the blinders about HIV/AIDS in the African-American community.

Be a part of history. Re-ignite the passion for HIV/AIDS self-empowerment. Support The Denver Principles Project and join NAPWA today at napwa.org, poz.com or realhealthmag.com.

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