Getting to Zero

December 1, 2011 By Hydeia Broadbent

The 2011 theme for World AIDS Day is “Getting To Zero.” The goal is to have zero new HIV Infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. But how do we get to zero?

I have decided to dedicate my life to getting to zero new infections.
One very important factor in getting to zero new infections has to do with changing the image we have of a person who is infected with HIV/AIDS.

When it comes to HIV/AIDS, we should assume that everyone we encounter may be infected. When will we realize that HIV doesn’t have a particular look? I know our minds have been stuck with the image from the late 1980s of those who were infected being white gay men. We also remember seeing people with AIDS who looked like death. We remember seeing these early victims of AIDS wasting away to the point we could see bones showing through their skin. They had dry lips and open sores.

Well, in 2011, AIDS is a short 4’8’’ young woman with a thick wrist and a pretty face. The sooner people realize that AIDS does not discriminate and that it is not a gay disease, the sooner the number of new infections will decrease. It is important to point to the data.

Thirty years after the AIDS epidemic burst onto the scene, blacks rank highest among racial groups in the U.S. infected with the HIV virus.

In 2009, African-Americans made up 14 percent of the total U.S. population but accounted for 44 percent of all new HIV infections. Of the total number of new HIV infections in the US among women, 57 percent occurred in blacks, 21 percent were in whites, and 16 percent were in Hispanics/Latinos.

Today, 1 in 5 Americans are HIV positive but don’t know it. Could you be that one? Could you have had unprotected sex with that 1 in 5? A person can have HIV up to 10 years without showing any symptoms, so please don’t think you can look at someone and tell they are HIV positive. While you can be in a safe and loving relationship with a person who is HIV positive you cannot go into a situation blind.

In 2012 it is important to talk to your sexual partner about HIV and STD testing. Also, it’s important to stress AIDS does not have to equal a death sentence, but early detection is key in prolonging one’s life with HIV/AIDS. This means people have to get tested. HIV testing is the only way you can

tell if a person is infected and the only way you can know if treatment is needed.

While there is hope for life after a positive HIV test result please know this is a costly disease. Many cannot afford the treatment and must depend on government assistance for help with paying for life-saving medications. However, with the recession and so many cutbacks, it is very difficult to obtain the medications you need to survive.

Yes, there is hope, but do not use advancements in medication as an excuse to be reckless and take part in risky sexual behavior. As much as I love my life, I would not wish AIDS on my worst enemy. Please take my testimony as a warning of what you do not want to happen to you and please remember the person who doesn't believe they are at risk for HIV is the one most at risk.

This World AIDS Day you can do your part by getting an HIV test and asking your sexual partner to get one as well.

For more information or a link to find an HIV testing center near you, please click here.

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