1 December 2015: World AIDS Day

December 1, 2015 By David Pieper

On World AIDS Day I am grateful for all the activists who fought hard for access to the life saving medication which keeps me, and many hundreds of thousands of others, alive today. I also remember the thousands of men and woman who didn't live long enough to benefit from the medication.

I cheered American Playwright Larry Cramer's notion of throwing fake blood in public places to protest against the bureaucratic paralysis and the apathy surrounding HIV; and those activists who stood up at the early HIV conferences in Australia and called the Health Minister a murderer. If it were not for Texas Electrician Ron Woodroof who set up the Dallas Buyers Club and his Australian counterpart, composer Lyle Chan, many more people would have died.

Similarly I champion the efforts of all those who are campaigning for fair access to effective hep C treatment and drawing attention to the inequality in access between countries.

So I am angered when I read articles like this one http://www.news-medical.net/health/Hepatitis-C-treatment-no-benefits-and-possible-harm.aspx from Ronald Koretz, M.D. of the UCLA school of medicine, suggesting hep C treatment might be harmful, and people with hepatitis C should wait for treatment if their liver disease is not severe.

This pathologising of hep C treatment ignores the psychological and emotional aspects of living with a highly stigmatised, infectious disease. Most people, even those with low grade liver damage, are symptomatic in some way eg fatigue, brain fog and cognition issues and some like me have other completely valid reasons for seeking immediate treatment.

There is much to learn in hep C from the history of HIV activism. We cannot not stay silent on any attempt to limit the access to DAAs or accept that we should wait for treatment.

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