19 August 2015: Chicken soup

August 19, 2015 By David Pieper

I've got a cold. Which is annoying since I've had the flu vaccine, and curious because I am expecting to be feeling off colour because of the hep C treatment, not something as common as a cold. Because I've had HIV for 19 years, my immune response has been supressed to the extent that I hardly show any symptoms of a cold. So it is quite common for me to go through the whole of winter without having a day off work, while all my colleagues are coughing and sneezing and having sick days. That's not to say a cold is harmless. In fact getting the cold or flu is more serious because any inflammation can seriously affect long term health for people with HIV. Right now, on hep C treatment, it is just a bit annoying.

So I made chicken soup, with matzo balls, using an old Jewish family recipe. Because as anyone who was brought up in a Jewish family knows, chicken soup cures every known ailment. Of course it is not just the consuming of the chicken soup: it's the long process of double boiling the chicken for six hours; the cathartic squeezing of every last drop of goodness out of the vegetables before discarding them; and making the matzo balls from scratch. Chicken soup for me is a reminder of family and the feeling of being safe and loved as a child. It is also about the love I share with my partner, who didn't grow up in a Jewish family, but doesn't mind occasionally being referred to as a "Shiksa", even though he is a not blond or female!

Hopefully I won't need too much chicken soup to get through this hep C treatment, but it is very reassuring to know I have the love and support of my partner and friends. I feel very lucky to be part of a supportive HIV+ community which operates like an invisible web of support. It protects me from the worst excesses of stigma and discrimination and provides a network of people who I know will not judge me. I am also proud of the fact that people with HIV have always been at the forefront of the fight, and have changed the way the world thinks about HIV.

I am acutely aware of the absence of a similar supportive community for people living with hepatitis C. For many people, acquiring hepatitis C relates to a part of their lives they are no longer connected to. For others those connections are a painful reminder of something they need to leave behind. I hope one day we will develop a hepatitis C community to provide that invisible web of support.

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