



Don't Die of Ignorance 2010: 22 years later and the message is still as relevant as ever

In January 1987 nobody was prepared for the AIDS tombstone campaign. The fact that every household in the country received the "AIDS Don't Die of Ignorance" leaflet speaks to the worries that the government of the time had about this mysterious illness. Did the campaign work? Almost certainly... the rates of non HIV sexually transmitted infections, such as syphilis, fell greatly following this campaign and Durex must have thought Christmas had come early, as a generation who were quite literally scared into wearing condoms were born.

So what's happened? Well that was over 20 years ago and the epidemic that was anticipated didn't happen; at least not here in the UK. It has been very different story in parts of South Africa, where as many as one in two women in some areas, are HIV positive and millions have died.....

As health care professionals, we find ourselves trying to strike a very difficult health promotion message. On one hand, preaching HIV should now be treated as other chronic medical conditions and yet on the other hand, trying to educate those who still vilify those infected; which just perpetuates the stigma surrounding HIV. Furthermore, we need to ensure that the public is fully aware that the affects of having HIV can be devastating and without treatment remains a life threatening condition.

It is a very difficult balance, however this year we seem to have had more young people diagnosed than I can remember. Working in a Sexual Health Clinic, you begin to realise that the condom using generation has now 'grown up' and today's teenagers were

not even born when the last shock campaign was launched. As the latest HIV figures for the UK continue to show a steady increase, maybe it is time for “Don’t Die of Ignorance 2010”.

One in three of those infected are unaware they are carrying the virus. This time around addressing ignorance not only means repeating all of the old rehearsed messages, such as who and how you can catch it, how to protect yourself and so forth. But now there is a further key issue which requires addressing. We need to spread the word that it’s ok to test. We, as health care professionals, should encourage it and do everything we can to normalise this simple blood test. Not to have the test is potentially a life threatening behaviour. Soon it may be that not to offer testing will be considered negligent. Why? Because treatment works well if you are diagnosed early. Leave it too long and you may become one of the 25 per cent who still die of HIV/AIDS because they were diagnosed too late for effective treatment.

There are no insurance penalties for having a negative HIV test and pre test counselling must be the exception, not the norm. We need to move to a position that when a person has a blood test, the only information they require is that their blood will be tested for a range of conditions, of which HIV is one of many, for which good treatment exists. It’s amazing how many people assume they must have been tested because they have had a blood test. With STI’s and HIV on the increase now is the time for “Don’t Die of Ignorance 2010”.

Notes

You may reproduce any part of this commentary and the “Don’t Die of Ignorance 2010” imagery by Tomkinson, Taylor and Hudson ²⁰⁰⁹ for educational and health promotion purposes, but are asked to keep the www.sexualhealthbirmingham.co.uk logo within the graphic and credit the designers. High definition versions are available on request from andrew.tomkinson@heartofengland.nhs.uk

Interviews can be arranged via Heart of England Communications department. Please call 07725 760 337.

World Aids Day key Messages:

- 1 in 3 people infected with HIV in the UK are UNAWARE they are carrying the virus.
- 1 in 3 people newly diagnosed with HIV are diagnosed with ADVANCED infection so cannot be treated as efficiently.
- A QUARTER of all DEATHS due to HIV/AIDS in the UK are attributable to late diagnosis.
- EARLY diagnosis AND treatment can result in a very long productive and healthy life (>30 years).
- LATE diagnosis is associated with significant MORTALITY and MORBIDITY which could be avoided.
- Most people who present with advanced HIV have been in contact with medical services for YEARS prior to diagnosis.
- RAPID HIV tests (results the same day) or within 10 mins (HIVFASTTEST) are AVAILABLE to encourage the public to get tested regularly.
- This years Birmingham WAD theme is POSITIVELYRED - changing attitudes towards HIV and AIDS – emphasis on living and being positive and reducing fear.



Government Health Promotion Campaign 1987 and Birmingham Heartlands HIV Service 2009 Campaign

HIV

DON'T DIE OF IGNORANCE

2010

www.sexualhealthbirmingham.co.uk

Dear David

Our health promotion messages are still falling on deaf ears. I think its time to bring back the tombstone! Pls find below the key messages we need to get through to the public asap.

- 1 in 3 people infected with HIV in the UK are UNAWARE they are carrying the virus
- 1 in 3 people newly diagnosed with HIV are diagnosed with ADVANCED HIV infection. This is much harder to treat
- A QUARTER of all DEATHS due to HIV/AIDS in the UK are attributable to late diagnosis
- EARLY diagnosis AND treatment can result in a very long productive and healthy life (>30 years)
- Most people who present with advanced HIV have been in contact with their doctor for YEARS prior to their diagnosis
- Babies born to mothers who are HIV positive have less than a 1% chance of being born infected IF mothers are diagnosed early in pregnancy and receive effective HIV treatment
- RAPID HIV tests (results the same day) or within 10 minutes (HIVFASTTEST) are now AVAILABLE. Call our clinic on 0121 424 3300 to organise yours or book online at www.sexualhealthbirmingham.co.uk

Kind regards

Dr Stephen Taylor MChB, FRCB, PhD
Lead Consultant, Birmingham Heartlands HIV Service

BIRMINGHAM HEARTLANDS HIV SERVICE



