



Notes to Take Home

HIV/Antiretroviral Update, November 2011

Janet Madsen

The latest HIV/Antiretroviral Update, which is sponsored by the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, was held November 25 in Vancouver. It was a day for hearing the latest in testing, treatment, and care for those living with HIV in BC.

Changes in Testing: Everyone Urged to Get Tested

Dr. Rolando Barrios presented information on the STOP program. For those who forget what the abbreviation means (there are so many, I've been known to keep a list), STOP stands for Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS. It's a pilot project taking place in the Lower Mainland and Prince George. Discussions at the update looked at how the project is developing in Vancouver.

Dr. Barrios outlined some of the goals of STOP, which include the following points taken from his slides:

- Reduce new HIV infections in Vancouver and Prince George
- Improve early detection of HIV
- Ensure timely access to HIV care and treatment
- Improve patient experiences in HIV care

To reduce new infections and improve early detection, one of the action points of STOP is to provide HIV tests to those who have never been tested before. The idea of risk groups has been used for many years and for far too long, Dr. Barrios said. He emphasized how important it is to move beyond the stereotypes. To illustrate that, he told a story about an elderly gentleman who had tested positive in hospital. The man never would have guessed he had HIV, but when the test was offered, he accepted and came up positive.

Ensuring timely access to HIV care and treatment can be easier said than done. When people are engaged in care, they do very well. But people can drop out of the health care system and get "lost to follow-up." Re-connecting with people who are known to be positive but not receiving care is another goal of the STOP project, and community health nurses are working to achieve this, which will also meet the objective of improving experiences in HIV care.

To target people for testing, STOP is being advertised in various ways. Testing is encouraged through posters in hospitals, a social media campaign called It's Different Now (www.itsdifferentnow.org) is raising awareness, and testing is provided at seven clinics in the Vancouver Coastal Health area.

Continued on page 2



Guests at PWN's 20th-anniversary gala peruse the silent auction items. Photo by Andrew Clauson

Contents

Cruising the Caribbean	5
"Aha" Moments: How a Community Capacity Building Course Is Changing Lives	7
PWN in Four Words: Respect, Community, Tenacity, Resilience	9
Photographs from the Anniversary Gala	10
Events and Program Information	12
Thanks to Our Supporters	14

Continued from page 1

The failure to provide everyone with the option of an HIV test can be seen as incomplete medical care.

Many women at PWN have said they had to fight their doctors for their initial test, because the doctor didn't think there was any risk. This wouldn't surprise Dr. Reka Gustafson, who presented on normalizing HIV testing. She described the scenario so many of our members have experienced with primary care (family) doctors. When a person asks for an HIV test, frequently he or she is told, "Don't worry about it." Dr. Gustafson said that if people are offered the test, they will take it, and advised her fellow doctors in the audience, "The barrier [to testing] is not the patient, it's us."

Dr. Gustafson went on to say that the failure to provide everyone with the option of an HIV test can be seen as incomplete medical care. With HIV treatment as advanced as it is these days, a person diagnosed with HIV can live a normal lifespan. Denying a person that option by NOT testing for HIV is actually doing harm.

Dr. Gustafson backed that assertion up with a statistic—65% of people who are diagnosed with HIV receive that diagnosis after they should be on treatment, according to current guidelines. A community worker pointed out that access to testing is all well and good, but pre- and post-test counselling must go along with it. People need to know why the test is suggested and what to do with its outcome, negative or positive—a very valid point. Many PWN members have reported they didn't get complete pre-test information, and the positive result was a shock.

As an additional note, a week later on November 30, the evening before World AIDS Day, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association issued a press release about concerns over privacy protection of HIV test results. Because HIV test results are housed in an electronic record keeping system, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association and Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network have concerns about who in the health care system has access to the information. You can read their press release by going here: <http://www.bccla.org/pressreleases/11STOP-HIV-Project.pdf>

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

Treatment as Prevention: Is It Time Start?

Treatment as prevention is a newish approach in the HIV care field. The idea is to treat people with HIV to improve their health, with the added benefit of preventing further HIV transmission. A recent study (HPTN 052) looked at serodiscordant couples (where one person has HIV and one doesn't) to try this out.

The goal of treatment is to boost immune cells (commonly called the CD4 count) and lower the amount of HIV in the blood (the viral load). It's hoped that treatment can bring the viral load under 50 copies within six months of starting treatment. In the HPTN 052 study, one group of positive people started immediately on treatment (with CD4 counts between 350 and 550). Others delayed treatment until their counts were 200 or less. Regardless of when the positive person started treatment, all couples were counselled on safe sex and condom use.

In the couples where the positive person started treatment immediately, there was one case of transmission. In the couples where the treatment was delayed, 27 transmissions took place. Overall, the study found that treatment was 96% effective in preventing HIV transmission.

When considering treatment, it's always important to figure out what you need to know before doing so. HIV treatment can change your life for the better in many ways, but going on it means you'll take it for the rest of your life. Do you have all the information you need to make a confident decision? Ask your doctor about dosing schedules, side effects, what to expect in terms of tests, and health care appointments, support organizations, and anything that seems related to your treatment. If you don't understand how your doctor puts things, ask again. It's your health and you have a right to know.

The BC Centre for Excellence launched a website on World AIDS Day to share more information about the treatment as prevention approach. It explains the reasons for HIV testing and the research behind treatment as prevention, and poses a challenge to get tested. Aptly titled "Treatment as Prevention," it can be found at <http://treatmentasprevention.ca/>

Vitamin D and HIV

Dietician Melodie Yong was another presenter on the day of the update, and she talked about vitamin D and HIV. Vitamin D is a vitamin that "behaves as a hormone," helping the body absorb calcium from food and assisting in cell growth, bone formation, immunity, and metabolism. It is an important one for those with HIV.

Vitamin D deficiency can lead to decreased bone density, then osteopenia and osteoporosis, both conditions of weakened bones. Having osteopenia or osteoporosis can increase your risk for fractures. Vitamin D deficiency can also weaken immune function, leading to increased risk for certain cancers like colon, breast, and, for men, prostate. It also can cause HIV to progress more quickly.

Vitamin D deficiency is common in people with HIV: 25 to 75% are deficient. Even though we were on the dark and rainy coast, there were hopeful questions asked at the update about whether sun exposure might supply the vitamin D we need (the questioners must have been from the Okanagan). Yong said that even without sunscreen, our dark winters can't provide the necessary levels that pos people need. And some HIV drugs can limit the absorption of vitamin D, especially efavirenz (Sustiva). To combat all of these barriers, Yong recommends taking supplements.

The recommendations on how much to take daily vary. Vitamin D is measured in international units (noted as IU on the vitamin bottle). Yong suggests that testing vitamin D levels isn't required, as "anyone can benefit from 1,000- 2,000 IU" per day. Check with your doctor if you're not taking vitamin D and are curious about what would be best for you.

As with all of these update days, there is far more information than can be captured in one article. There were also sessions on anal HPV in men, hepatitis C treatment regimes that are being tested, and metabolic changes with HIV. If you'd like to learn more from the day, videos on various aspects of HIV treatment can be watched on The BC Centre for Excellence website: <http://www.cfenet.ubc.ca/>



**The Cross Cultural Mental Health Program
and Ni Wakati are hosting a group for**

**African Women with HIV
at Raven Song 2450 Ontario St.
Basement Room**

**Nov 12, Dec 17, Jan 21, Feb 18, March 17
10:30-2:00 p.m.**

**November Topic: Side Effects of
Anti-retrovirals**

***Bring your children. Lunch and bus tickets will be
provided.***



For more details call Joanne: (604) 709-6501 ext 5

Please note this is not a Positive Women's Network event.

**POSITIVE OUTCOMES
Cruising the Caribbean**

Carrie

An experience of a lifetime started with a flight from Vancouver to Florida via Houston this past November. A cruise on the Crown Princess ship out of Fort Lauderdale included a Poz Cruise group—40 HIV+ hetero individuals and over 200 HIV+ gay men. I was disappointed that only 40 positive hetero persons were on this cruise, as I had expected higher numbers, but it was a great experience to meet new friends from around North America. The ship's other passengers were from all over. This was a week-long cruise with island day stops on Princess Cay, Curacao (pronounced Cure-a-sow), and Aruba. The weather was beautiful and warm.

Private events for those of us with HIV were planned for the week. Organizers would say, "A private function is now occupying this space," and people would move on promptly. I was amazed by how well things went. There were no disclosure worries.

Connecting with positive men and women on a professional level was so rewarding, as was enjoying their spirit and sharing memories together. I wanted to see and hear firsthand how others handled working, dealing with family issues, dating, and managing HIV. Meeting areas were held in different locations aboard the ship and ashore. The food was endless and abundant, with private and buffet dining, or pizza, burgers, and ice cream to be grabbed at the pool area while listening to island music.

On Princess Cay, a barbeque, exotic cocktails under palm trees, swimming, and snorkelling were a few of the many activities. HIV group sessions included "Questions and answers" and "Everything you wanted to know about HIV but were afraid to ask." Other activities involved dance lessons, a gym, bingo, a casino, an art show, entertainers, a comedian, singers, and dancers. There was a costume party and formal nights.

Sights included tours, hikes, museums, beaches, and a distillery where that world-famous liquor comes from. Then an evening at sea and the next morning off on the isle of Aruba. There was lots of sightseeing, shopping, and a lazy afternoon on the beach sipping fruit smoothies. The people were so friendly and

*I wanted to see and hear firsthand
how others handled working,
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and managing HIV.*

accommodating. Then back aboard ship on a comfy lounge chair under the stars, munching on popcorn, wrapped in a cozy blanket to watch a movie on the big screen. After lying around sun tanning, you could treat yourself to the spa, or check out the huge gym, or take a yoga or zumba class. There were hot tubs and four pools aboard ship with hilarious games going on. It was a holiday to do as much, or as little, as we liked. Get seasick? No worries, there was a list of preventative measures.

Saying goodbye to new friends was difficult, but exchanging emails and phone numbers made it feel like we would do this again.

Save your shekels and join me next year—it is a must-do event. Having future goals helps us thrive. Let's see if we can organize a group from Canada for the October 2012 Poz Cruise, which will include Cozumel, Belize, Roatan, and Grand Cayman Islands out of Fort Lauderdale. The listed cruise price is US\$449.00 and \$99.95 tax, plus flight. You are welcome to bring family and friends.

If you are interested in the cruise—a great experience and a way to meet new friends from around North America—email heteropozcruise2011@yahoo.com or contact Paul Stalbaum at Paul@cruisedesignstravel.com.



**Positive Women's Network
You Should Know**



**@PWN_BC
@YouShouldKnowCA**



PositiveWomenBC

p 604 692 3000 / 1 866 692 3001 f 604 684 3126 e pwn@pwn.bc.ca w www.pwn.bc.ca / www.youshouldknow.ca

Diabetes & HIV



Are you at risk?

- **Are you over 40?**
- **Do you have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes?**
- **Are you a member of a high-risk group, being of African or Aboriginal descent?**
- **Do you have high blood pressure?**
- **Do you have high cholesterol?**
- **Are you overweight (especially if you carry most of your weight around your middle?)**

Workshops

January 18 & March 14

Sign up at PWN: (604) 692-3000

**Leave your name and contact info
and Sangam will get back to you**

sangamg@pwn.bc.ca

(604) 692-3006

“Aha” Moments

How a Community Capacity Building Course is Changing Lives

Melissa Medjuck

Literacy Lives, a six-month pilot certificate program run at the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Harbour Centre, aims to provide a safe and supportive environment where learners can acquire the skills to create, set into motion, and evaluate their own community capacity building projects. At the same time, the program seeks to increase awareness about HIV and to support learners in developing and expanding their literacy skills.

Positive Women’s Network (PWN) is collaborating with SFU on this program, along with Health Initiative for Men, PHS Community Services, Vancouver Native Health Society, Vancouver Coastal Health, Youth Community Outreach AIDS Society (YouthCo), and Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation. The support team at PWN act as community coordinators; we liaise between the learners and the program, provide support to the learners, meet together regularly as a team, and attend classes in rotation with the learners.

Learner recruitment and interviews were conducted this past summer. We had 17 PWN members apply for the course, all of whom were amazing applicants. Unfortunately, we could recommend only six applicants to SFU for the program. After some difficult decision making, we recommended six PWN members to be a part of the program.

The program currently enrolls 30 learners, who have been attending classes since September 12. The class is a mix of people living with HIV and people affected by or at risk of HIV. Learners attend six hours of classes at SFU each week; they also attend tutoring sessions, check in with the course instructor, stay in touch with their community coordinator, meet

with their community project group, and complete their homework—whew! They are busy. Many of the learners are involved in other community projects and research projects, some volunteer, some work part-time, and some are single parents. This is a dynamic, diverse, and motivated group.

It has been my privilege to watch the PWN members on their learning journeys so far; they’ve had their ups and downs, bursts of creativity and moments of frustration, but through all these challenges and triumphs, they have remained committed to the course and committed to their ultimate goal of making a positive difference in their communities. Several of the learners have experienced “aha” moments, a moment of clarity, a defining moment, where they gain wisdom and self-awareness to change their lives.

In early October, one learner told me this: “I had a real epiphany last night. All throughout my life, I’ve felt like I was just bumbling through my life. Surviving, yes, but with no direction and no purpose. It really just came to me last night what I’m supposed to do. I know it sounds kind of hokey, for lack of a better word, but I’m really quite clear as to the path I should be going on. I want to be active in my own community around HIV. When I saw the light, I was really energized and felt empowered.”

Learners will implement their community capacity building projects from December 13 to February 7. Their evaluation of the success of the projects will begin mid-February. Each project group has two to five people in it. There is an incredible range of community capacity building projects happening in the program.

Continued on page 8



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Continued from page 7

A Taste of What PWN Members Are Working On for Literacy Lives

Back in the Game

A project to develop an information brochure on extra-curricular activities for low-income HIV-affected families in Surrey, New Westminster, Burnaby, and Vancouver.

Harm Reduction Outreach Burnaby Central Park

A project to promote and provide harm reduction resources and outreach to at-risk populations in the Burnaby Central Park area.

Artists and Allies

A workshop for HIV+ artists to create art that celebrates life. Project members will hold an art show to showcase this art at the Rhizome café in Vancouver.

Afro-Canadian Community Kitchen

A community kitchen for Afro-Canadians living with HIV in Surrey. Project members are working with a nutritionist to feature culturally appropriate nutritious food.

Harvest Food Co-op

A fresh fruit and vegetable co-op for people living with HIV in Vancouver. Project members hope to partner with local farmers.

Saving Spirits

Development of a model for reaching isolated Aboriginal people living with HIV in the Lower Mainland and throughout BC.

We at PWN are excited to see how the community capacity building projects unfold!

The course ends in March 2012 and learners will earn a Certificate in Community Capacity Building and become alumni of Simon Fraser University.



I was in denial for 9 years after my human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) diagnosis. While I was hospitalized for pneumocystis carinni pneumonia (PCP) in 1996, Aids Vancouver (AV) did outreach at my bedside. This is where I learned of Positive Women's Network (PWN). After much resistance, I finally decided it was time to get out there and seek support.

I felt afraid and nervous the very first time I walked through PWN's door but was warmly received by the person at the front desk. There were several women sitting in a living room setting. They welcomed me and what struck me was the openness and ease with which they were talking about HIV—such a different environment from my own stigma against myself, along with cultural barriers and societal stigmas which were rampant in the 1980s and 1990s and probably still to this day.

Shortly after I became a member I attended a PWN healing retreat where I didn't feel alone anymore with HIV. I've attended several support groups and workshops through PWN and have always felt supported by the staff.

I've always yearned for a sense of community, and have felt that sitting at the table at PWN chatting and having lunch with other members. Through the years, I've gained more courage and confidence around living with HIV thanks to my friends, PWN and the other organizations it has linked me to. I feel that PWN has been trying to get me involved for so many years and here I am today learning how to build communities.

This asset mapping assignment was completed by a learner in the Literacy Lives program

PWN in Four Words Respect, Community, Tenacity, Resilience

The following remarks were delivered by Marcie Summers, Executive Director of Positive Women's Network, at the 20th-anniversary gala on October 16, 2011.

When I was hired as the PWN Executive Director in 1993, I was the only staff member; we had a small office in a building shared with AIDS Vancouver and what was then BCPWA; we had 20 members, members being women living with HIV/AIDS; and I had to rent a computer to write the first grants. We've come a long way.

As I was reflecting on my remarks for this evening, four words came to mind.

The first was RESPECT. Respect is a value and a guiding principle in all that we do. Respect for our members, for their voices, for their lived realities, for their dignity. Respect for each other on our staff and volunteer teams, respect for divergent opinions and perspectives, and respect and acknowledgement of the passion we bring to our work. Respect for our community partners, locally, regionally, and nationally. Respect for the HIV movement here in BC, in Canada, and globally. Respect for human rights.

The second word was COMMUNITY. PWN creates a safe community of women, a sanctuary where women can meet other women, have a respite from the stresses of their lives, learn about HIV, and share

commonalities. Across this country we are part of a larger community of activists, people living with HIV, researchers, health care professionals, an expanding group of people committed to supporting people living with HIV and committed to preventing more infections and, most importantly, a community of people committed to social justice.

TENACITY certainly came to mind. If there is one thing you can say about PWN, it's that we are tenacious. We have had many challenges over the years: inadequate funding; indifferent and, at times, hostile political climates; discriminatory practices and policies; a complacent public. But we have carried on, just as our members carry on in the face of unfathomable stigma, stereotyping, and injustices.

And, of course, RESILIENCE. It is no accident that we chose this theme for our celebration tonight. The resilience of PWN members that I have witnessed over these many years is, at times, hard to even imagine or understand and is so inspiring. Resilience in the face of so many odds, so many challenges. And yet, in the drop-in, at retreats, in our programs, over the phone, what we witness is humour, compassion for others, determination. What we see are survivors. What we see are vibrant, alive women.

Yes, respect, community, tenacity, and resilience. As a woman, as an advocate, as an activist, I am incredibly proud to be part of the story.



PWN staff and board members at the gala

A Good Time Was Had By All



Thank you to our gold sponsor, Deloitte, as well as our silver sponsors, Viiv Healthcare Shire Canada and Abbott Canada, for their assistance in making our 20th-anniversary gala happen. Thanks also to all of the silent auction contributors and to Joe LaFleur of Transmission Inc., who produced our wonderful anniversary video. Much appreciation to Andrew Clauson, who took these stunning photographs at the gala. And thanks to everyone who came out and made it an evening to remember!



Join Positive Women's Network for our...

**Skill Enhancement & Wellness Weekend
for Women Living with HIV**

Friday, March 30, to Sunday, April 1, 2012
at Loon Lake

**Connect with other
HIV+ women!**



**Gain
Knowledge!**

This event is open to ALL
HIV+ women living
in British Columbia.

Be Empowered!



It's FREE! PWN covers all
weekend and transportation costs.

Deadline for applications is February 7, 2012.
Space is limited so apply early.

For more information, contact Positive Women's Network
Email: pwn@pwn.bc.ca
Telephone Lower Mainland: 604 692 3000 or Toll-free: 1 866 692 3001

Events and Program Information

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
drop-in	11:30 - 3:30	11:30 - 3:30	11:30 - 3:30	11:30 - 3:30	--
lunch	--	12:00 - 2:00	--	--	--
office	9:00 - 4:00	9:00 - 4:00	9:00 - 4:00	9:00 - 4:00	9:00 - 4:00

PWN Grocery Schedule

Schedule subject to change.
Regular grocery hours are 12pm to 2pm on Tuesdays.

JANUARY

January 3 - Open
January 10 - Open
January 17 - Open
January 24 - Food bank closed
January 31 - Food bank closed

FEBRUARY

February 7 - Open
February 14 - Open
February 21 - Food bank closed
February 28 - Food bank closed

MARCH

March 6 - Open
March 13 - Open
March 20 - Food bank closed
March 27 - Food bank closed

You must be registered to access the grocery, which is a partnership with AIDS Vancouver. To sign up, see a PWN support worker or your case worker at AIDS Vancouver.

Support Groups

New Westminster/Surrey and Abbotsford/Chilliwack areas

Do you live in one of these areas? A number of women living here have voiced the need for a regular support group. Some have also expressed an interest in peer support training workshops, in order to develop skills in supporting themselves and peers.

If you are interested in forming a support group, or participating in peer support training, or both, contact Valerie Van Clieaf, PWN Outreach and Support Worker:

valeriev@pwn.bc.ca
(604) 692-3005

Or leave her a message using the toll free line: 1 866 692 3001

Queer Women

Want to get together one evening at PWN to talk about living as a queer HIV+ woman?

Contact Sangam:
sangamg@pwn.bc.ca
(604) 692-3006



Events and Program Information

Not-the-Holiday-Lunch

All PWN members are invited to come for a turkey lunch on Tuesday, January 24, 2012 in room 103. Please contact Bronwyn for more information: 604-692-3008

Weekend Retreat

It's coming, the next Skill Enhancement and Wellness Weekend! Applications are due February 7, 2012. See the enclosed information and application sheets.

Daughters of Ruth

Daughters of Ruth is a local group formed to support women in rural parts of Africa.

If you would like further information about what this group does and how you can get involved with it, please visit <http://widowsandorphans.blogspot.com>.

Please note this is not a Positive Women's Network group.

Welcome new staff!



Photo by Aretha Munro

Monique Desroches and Aretha Munro are now sharing the Clerical Assistant position. Aretha will be assisting staff and members with all things phone, email, snail mail, and database related from Monday to Wednesday. You can find her outside of the office snapping photos and exploring the city on two wheels. Monique continues to work on Thursdays, and can be spotted by the bright colours in her hair.

Valerie Van Clieaf is the new Outreach and Support Worker. You may remember Val from a number of years ago at PWN. She is excited to be back. Her focus is working with women in the Fraser Valley beyond the Vancouver border, including those serving time at the federal and provincial institutions in Chilliwack and Maple Ridge. She's also working on support groups, so please contact her if you are interested.

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connect with us



Positive Women's Network, a partnership of women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, supports women in making informed choices about HIV/AIDS and health. We provide safe access to support and education/prevention for women in communities throughout British Columbia. The Positive Women's Network provides leadership and advocacy around women's HIV/AIDS health and social issues in the national and local health care communities.

Thanks to our supporters!

The work of Positive Women's Network is made possible by grants from the Provincial Health Services Authority of BC, the Public Health Agency of Canada/AIDS Community Action Program, and BC Gaming & Enforcement, as well as the following sponsors, whom we would like to thank:



Abbott Virology is the exclusive pharmaceutical sponsor of SpringBoard.



Bristol-Myers Squibb for sponsoring our Positive Players pocket guide.



Deloitte Touche for their fundraising and marketing support.



Janssen for sponsoring our lunch program.



MAC AIDS Fund for their contributions to our support and outreach programs.



Merck Frosst Canada Ltd. for supporting our food program.



RBC Foundation for supporting our Wellness Workshop Series.



Our portable housing subsidies and food program made possible by support from **Shooting Stars Foundation**.

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