

Doug Wirth, CEO

Challenging Times Ahead

There are so many challenges ahead of us. From new elected officials, to higher food and gas prices, to almost certain budget cuts, and major changes to New York's Medicaid program.

Change can be scary, especially if you feel all alone in it. VidaCare offers you many kinds of support. **Monthly member events** (see below) can help you feel part of the VidaCare family. The article on page 5, "You're Not Alone," reminds everyone to reach out instead of isolating.

Having a good relationship with your medical providers can also help you to deal with life's changes and medical challenges. Check out the top ten ways to maximize your care relationships on page 2, and/or get help in picking the right provider for YOU on page 4.

Here's some good news - VidaCare is growing! Thank you to all the members who helped identify facilities and providers who are newly contracted (see pg 6). You can download an updated copy of the **Provider Directory** from our website (www.vidacare.org).

I hope you'll join us for a **Member Town Hall Meeting** (see pg 6) in your neighborhood! Not only do we value your feedback and input; its always nice to spend time with members like you!

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Upcoming VidaCare Live Your Life Events For Members Only (+1 Guest)

October 15th (3-6pm) ~ Healthy Cooking Made Easy

Join the VidaCare Chef in cooking a delicious, healthy 3 course meal.
PSI, 1545 Inwood Avenue, Bronx, NY 10452

November 19th (4-7pm) ~ Aromatherapy

Learn how certain smells can help you relax, reduce pain, release stress
and make you feel happier.

Village Center for Care, 121B W 20th St, NY, NY 10011

January 22nd (3-6pm) ~ Afro-Caribbean Dance

Is it in you! Come and enjoy great body movements and explore some
exciting music and rhythms that will delight you.

HW 13th St, 320 West 13th Street, NY, NY 10014

February 18 (3-6pm) ~ Reiki / Therapeutic Touch

Reduce stress and promote healing with this "hands on" approach.

Location to be announced.

March 18th (3-6pm) ~ Accessing Inner Peace

Learn ways to help you feel peaceful and happy!

Location to be announced.

Call **1-800-556-0689** to reserve your
seat & reconfirm the event locations.
Members only (plus one guest)!



From the *New York Times*, September 30, 2008

How You Can Help a Doctor Give the Best Care

By JANE E. BRODY

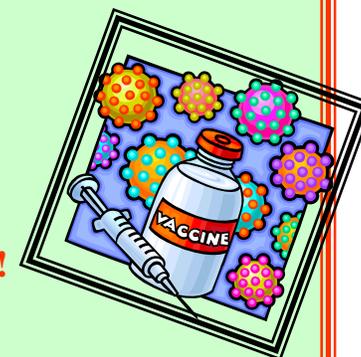


As primary care doctors become increasingly pressed for time, here are 10 tips to help maximize the benefits you get from modern medical care.

1. Write down your questions before calling or seeing the doctor. Don't wait until the end of a visit to mention a pressing health concern.
2. Keep a diary of your symptoms and the circumstances under which they occur, and bring it with you to the appointment.
3. Maintain an up-to-date list of all the medications and over-the-counter drugs and supplements you take and their dosages. Bring that with you.
4. Write down what the doctor says about your condition and how to treat it.
5. Know your personal and family medical history, including illnesses and operations you had and diseases or causes of death of your parents, grandparents and siblings.
6. Be honest about your lifestyle. If you smoke, drink alcohol or take recreational drugs, reveal how often or how much.
7. Be willing to see a physician's assistant or nurse practitioner for routine care like wellness checkups and immunizations.
8. Ask if the doctor uses e-mail and checks it daily. If so, use e-mail messages to discuss non-urgent matters or lingering concerns, to clarify treatment instructions and to report an improvement in symptoms. But call immediately if your symptoms fail to improve as expected or suddenly get worse.
9. If you call about a worrisome symptom and the doctor tells you to go to the emergency room, don't wait. If you are told to go by ambulance, do it; you'll be seen right away, which could make a life-or-death difference.
10. Get an independent second opinion if you are told that you have a life-threatening condition or that surgery is needed to correct a problem, or if you are doubtful about the quality of tests that were done.

Important Flu Vaccine Facts

- **Not everyone should take the live vaccine.** People with weakened immune systems such as those living with HIV and AIDS should **NEVER** take a live virus vaccine such as *Flumist*.
- **You can't get the flu from the flu shot!** It's all a matter of timing. The vaccine takes approximately 10 days to 2 weeks to fully protect a person from the flu. If you are exposed to the flu before that time, flu symptoms may occur. But simply getting the vaccine can not give a person the flu.
- **You need a flu shot every year.** Because the virus strain that causes the flu changes each year, so does the vaccine. Last year's flu shot will not protect you against this year's virus strain.
- **Mom's to Be Need to Get Vaccinated.** Pregnant and breast feeding mothers **CAN** and should receive the flu shot.



Ask your Health Care Provider about getting your flu shot!

For more information, visit: www.aids.about.com.

Picking a Provider that's Right for YOU

Dr. Jerome Ernst, VidaCare Medical Director



Choosing a good health care provider, be it physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant, is a complicated process that could leave you unhappy and frustrated. ***But finding a good provider who is also right for you is one of the most important health decisions that you will make.***

Here are some things to consider that can help you find a good match (check all that apply for you):

- Do you and your provider speak the same language (do you understand each other)?
- Do you like each other or do your personalities clash?
- Do you prefer a provider who is confident and self assured or does the "know it all type" get on your nerves?
- Do you prefer to work with someone who is more hesitant and cautious?
- Do you want a provider of the same sex or opposite sex?
- Could your provider be biased against certain groups and not comfortable working with you?

It's best to answer these questions as soon as you begin working with a provider.

As a person living with HIV/AIDS, the course of your disease can be profoundly affected by your relationship with your provider. People who have a good relationship with their provider usually enjoy better health. It's hard to discuss personal health matters with anyone, let alone a provider whom you do not trust or respect. Hiding important personal health issues is not the best way to a healthy life. The right provider can be reassuring and supportive, even if there is not a quick solution to the current health problem. This support is very important in reducing your stress and can improve your health and well being.

A good relationship with your provider is important but there are also other factors to consider when choosing a health care provider. Let's review five (5) key ones:

1. Knowledge

Is the provider an HIV expert? You want someone who is up to date on the latest medical knowledge. New HIV drugs require providers to constantly refresh their knowledge of these medications. Knowing when to use newer drugs, what side effects to look out for and what drug interactions could occur are all important to the person living with HIV.

Does the provider have enough HIV experience? Knowing the various symptoms of HIV disease is equally important. A cough may mean entirely different things depending on your CD4 count. Not every cough requires a chest X-ray or CT scan. Knowing when to act is part of the art being a good clinician. .

Does the provider have good medical knowledge of illnesses other than HIV? This is more and more relevant for today's HIV population. As people are living longer with HIV, they are experiencing the common diseases of aging. HIV providers may not have a lot of experience treating the common ailments of an aging population such as high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease etc. When choosing a provider, look for one who either treats both HIV-infected and uninfected patients or has experience with the non HIV related illnesses. Don't be afraid to ask about their experience at your first meeting.



2. Communication

Does your provider explain things in a way that you can understand? Does s/he really listen to you? Your provider needs to help you understand what's happening. You also need to be understood and helped to feel better. To do this, a provider needs to have a good 'bedside' manner, and not everyone does. For me, this part of being a doctor is most important. But a good bedside manner without good clinical knowledge and skills is no good either. Being falsely reassured and comforted does not help the patient.



Does your provider answer your questions and/or go over things that you didn't understand? I frequently tell my patients to write down all their questions before our meeting. Then, we discuss as many of them as time allows or schedule another visit within a couple of weeks if more time is needed. I find that having the patient bring a list of questions is the best way to make sure the stress of the meeting doesn't result in important issues being forgotten.

3. Access

Can your provider be reached in times of need? Phone calls should be returned the same day. Find out ahead of time: a) what to do in an emergency; b) who covers on evenings/weekends, and c) to whom should you talk to when your provider is not available.

4. Hospital Care

If you need to be hospitalized, will your provider be the one taking care of you? Ask what hospital your provider is affiliated with. Do you like that hospital? If you end up in another hospital, who will take care of you? If your provider does not follow patients admitted to a hospital, who does? Are you happy with that arrangement?

5. Office Staff



How nice and helpful is the staff at the provider's office? Do they treat you with respect? Are you OK if you're called by your first name? Does staff call you the day before to remind you of your appointment? Is it easy to get an appointment? Is the office clean? Are blood/lab tests drawn at the office, or are you sent across town? Does staff arrange referral appointments for you, or must you do this yourself? Does staff make you feel comfortable, or do you feel as if you are disturbing them? Remember, you're the patient; they are being paid to help you.

Your Role

What can you do to help your provider give you the best medical care?

Learn as much as you can about your disease, including: basic HIV information, how it affects the body, how one can get it, what happens if it's not treated and what treatments exist. VidaCare, the internet and other organizations can help you get this information.

Know your own medical history:

When and how you were infected (if possible),

What HIV drugs you have taken,

What your highest and lowest CD4 counts and viral loads were,

What vaccinations you have had.

Keep this information in a notebook with copies of lab results, hospital discharge summaries if any, lists of medications you have taken, and any side effects you may have had. And this is just the HIV-specific information you need. It's also good to know your blood lipid levels, liver function tests, TB test results and mammogram results if you are a woman over 40, etc. The best way to do this is to ask for a copy of each lab test when you get it done, and to keep them all in one place. That way you have a complete record of your history even if you change providers.

Remember, you have a role to play in getting what you need! And finding a provider who takes your life as seriously as you do and then taking the steps above will go a long way to making your life as healthy and as long as possible.



“You Are Not Alone” By Jim Lewis and Michael Slocum

Maybe you have tested HIV-positive very recently; maybe you've known it for some time, but this is the first time you've reached out for information or support. ***You need to know that you are not alone.*** There are an estimated 1 million HIV-positive people in the United States.

Testing positive for HIV does not mean that you have AIDS, but HIV is probably the greatest threat to your life you have ever faced. This virus may remain inactive in your body for a long time, but it may not. If you are healthy now, you may still go on to develop some sort of health problems related to HIV. You may develop AIDS. There remain many uncertainties surrounding HIV, and though there is currently no "cure" for HIV infection, there are treatments. You need to learn what information is available and make informed choices about your health.



Many HIV-positive people now live fulfilling and happy lives. Many are healthy and show no symptoms of disease. Many choose to take treatments and drugs that promise to lengthen their lives. So, as serious as this is, there is hope. You do not have to look at testing HIV-positive as if you've been given a death sentence.

It's a good thing you found this out. As upsetting as testing positive may have been for you, you are better off knowing, so you can learn about HIV and decide what you want to do about it. The fact that you cared enough about yourself to get the HIV test and the fact that you are reading this magazine show that you are concerned about your health. So give yourself some credit. You have taken important first steps to take care of yourself, and you should be glad about it. Years ago, those who tested HIV-positive had few places to turn for support. These people felt like they were hanging in limbo. Fortunately, much has changed. We know more about HIV now and many organizations have formed around the world to offer support and information to people living with this virus. Many have already faced the questions inherent in living with HIV, and many will follow. ***You don't have to face this by yourself.*** There are lots of hands reaching out to assist you.

Your Emotional Health

Finding out that you are infected is usually overwhelming. Even if you had suspected it for some time, learning that you are can be a very traumatic experience. Testing HIV-positive has led some people to quit their jobs, quickly write out their wills, and say goodbye to their friends and family, only to discover that they aren't sick and will probably live for many years to come. It's common to perceive these results as an immediate death sentence, but this is simply not true.

What you are feeling now is perfectly normal. Anger, fear, confusion, numbness, depression -- all are completely natural reactions to the kind of news you've heard. If you've known for even several weeks, you may find yourself having a normal day, then suddenly remember that you are HIV-positive. It's very common for this kind of realization to just "hit you in the face" out of nowhere over and over again. You are not going crazy if this happens to you. Your moods may swing from profound sadness one moment to extreme anger the next. That's normal, too. The first step to getting through this emotional turmoil is to acknowledge what you are feeling. Don't be surprised to find yourself going through the day in a state of shock. Allow yourself to feel nothing. Your emotions will come rushing back in soon enough. This is merely a way that your mind "turns off" to allow you to cope with a problem.

If you are feeling angry, that's fine. You have every right to be angry and a lot to be angry about. This virus is threatening your very existence. It's okay to express this anger. If you're frightened, acknowledge your fears. You are thinking about things that would make anyone fearful. You are allowed to feel the way you do. Don't be hard on yourself or think you have to be strong. You don't have to be anything.

Fear of Sickness and Death

Almost everyone is afraid of getting sick and dying. If you're young, you may never have had to face the death of someone close to you. We often think of dying as something that happens only when we're old. You may never have really considered the reality of your own death before. Now, suddenly, you are HIV-positive and your mortality becomes very real. You may be afraid of pain, of hospitals, or of becoming unattractive to others through an illness. Your reaction to the idea of getting sick or dying could go one of two ways.

VidaCare's GROWING! ~ More Providers = MORE CHOICE FOR YOU!

A growing network of providers means more choice for you. That's the main reason VidaCare is so busy expanding its provider network. VidaCare's Provider Services team is working hard to build the best network of HIV primary care providers, specialists and hospitals so that you can find everything you need.

VidaCare Provider Network as of October 2008

HIV PCPs	77
Specialists	4073
Mental Health/Chemical Dependency Providers	842
Ancillary Providers	384

New Provider Highlights

Brooklyn Plaza Medical Center	Brooklyn
Dr. Jill Tolia	Brooklyn
MedAlliance Health and Rehab Services	Bronx
Essen PCPs	Bronx
Dr. Reza Chowdhury	Manhattan
Harlem East Life Plan	Manhattan
Dr. Peter Photangtham	Manhattan

Members play an important role in Network Development! If you know of a provider who you feel should participate in the VidaCare network, please contact us at **1-800-556-0689** with the provider's name, phone number and/or office address. We'll contact the provider to see if he/she is interested in joining our network.

How to find out if your favorite doctor is in the VidaCare Network? That's simple! Just look in the Provider Directory on the VidaCare website (www.vidacare.org) or call Member Services at **1-800-556-0689** and we'll send you a Provider Directory.



Member Advisory Council

Since 2003, the **Member Advisory Council (MAC)** meets quarterly to help ensure that VidaCare is responsive to our members needs. Elections for new MAC representatives for the 2008 - 2009 term were held at various sites in April and May 2008! Thank you to those leaving office and welcome to those starting out!

To find out more about the MAC, attend a Town Hall Meeting or ask the staff or MAC representative from your primary care site.

MAC Meetings (2:30 4:00pm)

Wednesday, September 10, 2008
Wednesday, November 20, 2008
Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Wednesday, June 17, 2009
Wednesday, September 16, 2009
Wednesday, December 9, 2009

Meetings location: 248 West 35th St, 7th Floor
NYC 10001

Town Hall Meetings

Fall 2008 Schedule (11-1pm)

Wednesday, October 8, 2008 (HW 9th St)
Friday, October 10, 2008 (HWENY)
Tuesday, October 14, 2008
Wednesday, October 22, 2008 (VCNY)
Thursday, November 6, 2008 (H U)
Wednesday, November 12, 2008 (St. Mary's)
Thursday, Nov 13, 2008 (HW 13th St)
Friday, November 21, 2008 (Promesa)



You may decide that you are definitely going to live and that there is no way that this virus is ever going to "get" you. This is a form of what's called denial -- refusing to face some of the possibilities of living with HIV. If you find yourself feeling this way, try to keep in mind that having hope to go on with your life is good. However, it can become dangerous if it keeps you from taking care of yourself.

The other way you might choose to deal with the subject is by deciding that you are absolutely going to die of this and there is nothing you can do about it. If you go this way, you may find yourself fantasizing about your own sickness and death. You have to keep in mind that there are many people who are HIV-positive who are living productive, happy lives, and you can be among them if you choose. It's good to face up to the possible consequences of this infection, but not to the point that living today becomes less important than your fear of the future. It helps to remind yourself that everyone will die, but that doesn't prevent most people from living today.

Starting Over

One of the truths of testing HIV-positive is that once you know, you can **never not know** again. For better or worse, your life will always be different now. You may be experiencing great feelings of loss about this. You may feel that certain areas of your life are now in the hands of doctors, insurance companies, or symptoms. This can make you feel as though you have less control over your own life and may cause you incredible anxiety.

Know this -- you do not have to give up control of your life. By arming yourself with information and deciding what is right for you, you will soon realize that you are still the same person you were. It is your life, your body, your health, and no matter how well-meaning your family, your friends, or your doctor may be, they have no right to take control of your life. Allow yourself to take time to decide what you want to do. Then go do it.

You may find that many of the priorities in your life change rapidly. If you are considering making major changes in your life, just make sure that you think them through carefully. Many HIV-positive people have made huge changes in the way they live. Many have broken bad habits, such as drinking too much or smoking. Some have gotten out of bad relationships or quit jobs they really hated. Facing the possibility of getting sick or dying has made many of our lives much better because it has made us take action in areas we have previously ignored or repeatedly put off. Mortality can be a great motivator.

Some people blame themselves for being HIV-positive. This kind of guilt and self-hate is very destructive. Regardless of how you were infected, you did not go somewhere or do something with the intention of infecting yourself -- so why beat yourself up about it? You are facing enough right now; you don't need to punish yourself for testing HIV-positive also.

Grief, or extreme sadness, is one of the emotions that most HIV-positive people face at some point. You may be grieving for yourself, facing the possibility of your own death. For many of us, the virus is not only affecting our lives, but the lives of those we love. Many have lost friends and loved ones to HIV, or have many people in their lives who are also HIV-positive. Allow yourself to express grief and fear in some way. Permit yourself to cry. These feelings are valuable and normal; ignoring them will not make them go away.

You may also feel that you are now damaged in some way -- that no one will want to touch you or love you or that you are less desirable because you are HIV-positive. You may feel that you will never be able to love again, that no one would want to be with you if they knew that you were HIV positive. These feelings will pass. You are not "damaged goods." You are still a valuable person, as capable of giving and receiving love as ever. You can make your own decisions, relax, and enjoy each day. This may be a struggle and you may have to find new ways of coping with daily life, but it's worth it.



Getting Support

Many of us have been raised with the idea of "rugged individualism," that we must face things on our own, that this is what "strength" is all about. Asking for help or reaching out for support are often considered weaknesses. Consequently, a very common response to testing HIV-positive is withdrawal. We isolate ourselves, hiding the news of our status. This can be very painful.

Your life does not have to be doom and gloom. It is possible to have a very positive attitude as a person living with HIV -- millions are doing it right now -- but it is much more difficult to get on with your life and live happily if you're trying to do it alone.

There's no need for you to handle this by yourself, and it's probably a mistake even to try to do it. You are not the only person facing this. Learn who the others are and what they have to offer. Just hearing how someone else has adjusted to living with the virus can be enough to help you realize that life is still good, that you can still have love and laughter. And you may also be surprised to learn that your own sharing can help others. In sharing the issues that concern us, each of our voices lends strength to the others.



Support groups ... are a powerful means of learning to cope with this new beginning. There are support groups offered by HIV/AIDS organizations across the [city]. If you don't know of an HIV/AIDS organization in your area, call [VidaCare at (800)-566-0689]. If there's no support group in your area, you may be just the person to get one started. Just remember: those millions of people living successfully with HIV are people who've reached out to get the help they needed. Wherever you are, you can find support, or the means to create it. It just doesn't make sense for us to face the same issues without helping each other out. ***We are not alone. And neither are you.***

Smoking and HIV ~ Be a Quitter!! (Reprinted from www.aidsinfonet.org)

People with HIV disease are more likely to smoke than those persons not infected. Yet, smoking is even more dangerous for those of us with HIV because it makes it even harder to fight certain infections. If we smoke we are more likely to get pneumocystis (PCP) and bacterial pneumonia, thrush and oral hairy leukoplakia (whitish mouth sores). These risks exist for both smokers of tobacco and marijuana. For women, smoking can increase the risk and severity of infection with human papilloma virus (HPV).



Smoking also increases the likelihood of suffering complications from HIV medication. For example, smokers are more likely to have nausea and vomiting from some HIV medications. Some HIV medications also slightly increase the risk of heart disease, but smoking is the greatest controllable risk factor for strokes and heart attacks. If you quit smoking now—you will greatly reduce this risk!

Quitting is Hard—We get it. Talk to your health care provider about getting the support you need to quit smoking. Many have found nicotine replacement and other medications helpful. Others have used group support or behavioral modification therapy. Hypnosis, acupuncture and other alternative treatments have helped many others to kick the habit. Find the one that works for you and be a quitter! You're worth it! For more information on quitting visit these websites: www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco; www.gaysmokeout.net or www.lungusa.org or <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/>