

## AIDS And You Contents

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## Worse than cancer

It is bad enough being told at the age of twenty-three that you have cancer and are likely to die, but when the disease is AIDS it can seem far worse.

Imagine that you go to the doctor because you have been feeling very run down and tired for the last few weeks. He sends you to the clinic where they do one or two tests. Before you know what is happening they have rushed you up to the ward. They do some more tests and everyone runs around looking very worried.

Then the doctor comes in and tells you that you are very seriously ill and you will need to have a big operation tomorrow. He says you will be in for at least a week. Two days later another doctor comes to see you. He tells you that you have a very rare form of cancer. It is very advanced and the outlook

**is terrible.**

**Your whole world has fallen apart in an instant: all your hopes and dreams for the future have been**

**dashed. It cannot really be true. It is hard to take Your plans for training, a job, a home of your maybe to get married and have children, and live a ripe old age—all of these things have been crushed.**

**Your parents are beside themselves with worry and grief. What kind of a world is it where children die before their parents? It is like the whole natural order has been turned upside down.**

**Feeling suicidal**

**But AIDS can seem worse than any of this. Some-times I ask a class at school what they would do if they went to give blood and a few days later a letter came asking them to reattend. When they go back a man there tells them that their blood has tested positive for HIV.**

**Many people tell me they would commit suicide. They could not face the thought of everyone wondering how they had got it. How could they tell Dad? Could they tell him about using drugs, or having been with many women, or being gay and having sex with lots of other boys and men?**

Many people do feel like committing suicide and some kill themselves just after finding out about AIDS or an early infection, which, is why so much care and support is needed after someone has been told. A friend of mine who is a doctor was shocked one day last year to wake up in the morning and find that someone had parked his car at the bottom of the garden and had gassed himself with the exhaust. He had discharged himself against advice from the AIDS ward just a few hours previously. He could not face the thought of life with AIDS.□

Throw him out□

I remember one occasion we had a couple round for dinner. The subject of AIDS came up as it often does. Then the conversation turned to homosexuality and the ways different people develop as they grow up. I was shocked when the wife told us in no uncertain terms that if their five-year-old son was ever to develop signs of being homosexually inclined as a teenager, whether he remained celibate or not, she would throw him out of the house and have nothing more to do with him. No wonder many people with AIDS are careful whom they tell. In most people's minds, to admit you have AIDS is the same thing as admitting you are a loose character with low moral standards, although as we have seen this is often quite untrue.□

In fact most women with HIV in some□ □ [Africa](#) n countries have been faithful before [&nbsp;&nbsp;marriage&nbsp;&nbsp;](#) and celibate since, but infected because their partners have not kept themselves in the same way.□

Collecting the corpse□

I went onto an AIDS ward one day and was disturbed to see an anxious young man who was obviously near to death, and dying on his own. I asked where his family were and whether they had been contacted. The answer was that he had been unable to bring himself to tell them what was happening and he did not want anyone else to do so. He was deteriorating fast. Possibly in the morning the ward would contact his mother many miles away, to come and collect the corpse of her son whom she thought was fit and well.□

When she came she would probably hardly recognise him. His body was a mere skeleton compared how he had been seven months ago. His face was sunken and his skin was covered in an angry rash. His body bore the scars of a long hard fight against several infections. He had asked that the death certificate should only say 'pneumonia' because wanted to save her the pain. If she had known the truth whom would she ever be able to tell?□

Living at home□

Sometimes the anger is so fierce that it affects those who are doing the caring. A good friend of mine was told by her dad that she was being cut off from the family. From now on it will be as if she did not exist. Her great crime was to fall in□ [love](#) □ with a man who some years previously had become infected and was now ill. For many months she cared for him, and after he had died, the final crime was to decide to carry on caring for those with AIDS.□

A community nurse in London had recently had a long day. That night, in bed with her husband, she began to tell him about someone with AIDS who been very ill and upset at home, and who she spent some time with. Get out of this bed,' shouted, 'and don't come back in here until you have stopped going there.'□

**I do not believe there is a country anywhere in the world where people with HIV have not experienced rejection, hostility, prejudice and fear.□**

**You can begin to understand now why teacher at a school for young children was upset to find himself on the AIDS ward. Having AIDS was the least of his worries, nor was he afraid of dying He was scared in case anyone from the school came to see him and it got back to the parents or governors from the staff what was wrong with him. His whole reputation and career would be in tatters□**

**You can also understand a priest who was constantly afraid that one of his own parishioners that worked in the hospital would come to the ward and recognise him. An increasing number church leaders are becoming ill from AIDS. We should expect it. If many people are finding faith in Christ, and if HIV survives conversion unless there is a miracle, then we should find many in the church who later become ill although they have been Christians for many years and have been celibate or faithful since finding faith.□**

**Getting the sack□**

**People often lose their jobs when the boss finds why they are ill.□**

**A number of companies were asked what they would do if they found they were employing someone who had AIDS. Quite a few said they would sack the person straight away. Others said they would encourage the person to leave. Either way it was clear that in the future a lot of people with AIDS are going to find themselves with no job, even though they may be perfectly well enough to work most of the time.□**

**It is not just businesses that are severe. A solicitor was asked the other day to pack his case and go: 'We don't want that sort of thing here.'**

### **Bust and dying**

**Every day the number of people with financial difficulties because of AIDS is growing. It frequently happens that landlord objects if he discovers one of his tenants has AIDS. Maybe he is afraid the rest will move out when they get to hear, or maybe have harsh feelings like some of the others we have seen Either way, it is quite common for someone to come out of hospital after just being told they have AIDS to discover their belongings have been thrown out and the locks have been changed.**

**Sometimes the culprit is the person they have been living with. I know of one occasion where someone found the locks changed by a former lover, another where the former lover had cleaned the out leaving nothing, not even a chair, a lamp, a table or a bed to sleep on. We were able to buy this man a new bed immediately, but a whole home takes time to rebuild.**

### **Wandering the streets**

**The number of people who have become homeless or destitute because of AIDS is growing each week and is becoming a major problem in some countries.**

### **Who can I trust?**

In all of this you can see that someone with AIDS has most of the things to cope with that someone with cancer has, as well as the extra tragedy of having a terminal disease so young - I speak as a doctor with experience of both diseases. But the worst thing by far is the response of the people around you. Will the next person I meet feel sorry for me (which I hate) or want to see me dead and tell me it's all my own fault? Who is my friend and who is my enemy? If I tell my friend about my illness, will it be kept a secret, or how many days will it take until my friend has told someone else?□

No wonder suicide is seen as a better option. The accumulated shock, grief and anguish of losing many relatives and friends can mean that people run out of energy and inner resources.

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