

AM I WORTH MYSELF?

(the III **EUROPEAN AIDS** Conference,
Amsterdam, II.2000)

(translated from Latvian)

The discussion whether to **start early or not** is still going on. The previous slogan on starting early is slowly fading away because of:

- long- term combo use side effects (polyneuropathy, lipodystrophy, diabetes, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides)
- difficulties adhering to HAART regimens
- spread of resistant HIV strains caused by bad adherence to HAART regimens.

Participants of “Adherence” workshop stressed both the significance of patients’ own decisions and importance of doctor - patient dialogue. E.g., some Belgian guy before deciding on a therapy, had an hour- long discussion with his doctor.

An interesting approach to visualise **resistance**: in order not to see its enemy (i.e. – the medication), the virus has to keep it close to itself all the time (i.e. – drugs should be taken regularly) – so that the virus has no possibility to step back, see the face of its enemy and start forming mutations to which the enemy won’t be enemy anymore.

Treatment activism is quite wide- spread in Europe (except its Eastern part). In some European countries activists have started **educating PWAs** on HAART.

E.g., RFSL in cooperation with the Stockholm Gay clinic has initiated a “HAART school”. Each time some 8-10 participants have a 3 hr long workshop, facilitated by doctor, nurse and treatment activist.

An Amsterdam- based gay organisation “SAD – Schorer Fonds” holds a different type of workshops. Every 5 meetings with professionals at “Fonds” are followed by 5 gatherings without them (each time at some participant’s house, its host being the facilitator). One of these workshops discusses the EATG video “Moments of Decision”.

Both Swedish and Dutch patients do like these workshops. Some Dutchman has even exclaimed: ”So, I’m not the only one who sometimes gets his pants full...!”

There are different **behaviour models**. One of them is “not testing”. Its Canadian supporter confessed that his negative HIV test result took too long...

Mentalities differ as well. E.g., you should not tell African migrants they are HIV- positive (this is seen as something good) or that several thousands of virus copies have been discovered in their blood (this strikes horror). As often

as not they are sending half of their combinations to relatives in Africa who, in their turn, don't know how to use them...

The Dutch "SAD – Schorer – Stichting" organised a seminar "F*cksh*p" with even doctors among its panellists. Some of the topics were safe **anal sex**, anatomy and hygiene of genitals; controlling pain, methods of relieving, tips on reaching orgasms etc.

Conference presentations are revived by witty slides.

A presenter was speaking on the **lack of self- confidence**. The caricature's title goes: "Wanna masturbate, but I'm not even worth myself!"

A.Kalnins,
AGIHAS