

Positively positive

Bradford McIntyre in Vancouver shares his story

I was infected with HIV in 1984. In 1985, I was told I had six months to live but I chose not to accept that. Instead, I empowered myself to do all I could to fight this virus. Thanks to my healthcare team and other people living with HIV, I learned ways to stay healthy, to take responsibility for my life and I avoided medication for over a dozen years.

It wasn't that I didn't get sick or need medical attention, I certainly did! There were countless doctor's appointments, blood tests at the hospital and more times than I can count trying to fix the complications that appeared.

After some 13 years of living with HIV, I did become seriously ill. In July 1998, I developed PCP (pneumocystis carinii pneumonia). My health deteriorated and it looked as though I might die. On World AIDS Day in 1998, I started my first highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART). After just four weeks on medication, my CD4 count of 40 went up 200 points, the PCP was eradicated and my viral load

of several million particles went down to thousands. With a reduced viral load, I could once again absorb nutrients. I regained the weight I had lost and started to strengthen my body through nutrition, exercise and complementary therapies.

Without HAART there would be far more suffering and AIDS-related deaths. Some people don't tolerate these medications, as sometimes they can be toxic. But this is true of the treatments for many other illnesses as well. Myself and countless others have gone on to enjoy life, thanks to HIV/AIDS medications.

After two years, my HAART combination began to fail. A genome test showed I was resistant to all the HIV medications available, (even though I'd only ever taken AZT for nine months, years earlier, and my current drug treatment). In 2000, I enrolled in a drug study for a new protease inhibitor, lopinavir/ritonavir (Kaletra). Within the first four weeks of my new treatment (3TC + d4T + Kaletra), my CD4 count climbed to 340 and my viral load was undetectable (less than 50 particles). It's now 2005, I'm still taking the same medications, I have a CD4 count of 790 and the virus is still undetectable.

