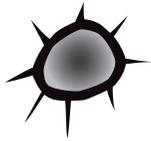


voices

Voices of Positive Women's newsletter



What has Spirituality Done for me?

For some people, they might answer God. For me, spirituality was something I had to re-introduce to my life two years ago when my life was spiraling out of control. It was then that I decided to start my healing journey.

I went to an Aboriginal healing lodge called Cedar Healing Lodge. I chose this place for two reasons. One reason was to re-educate myself on dealing with my past as being a sexual assault survivor as well as a PHA. The second reason was to re-educate myself on traditional teachings as well as to learn more about my Ojibway culture and be submerged in my culture. It was then that I learned Good Orderly Direction. This wonderful place had taught me to change my life to the good in all aspects, living my life according to the Medicine Wheel. For far too long I had lived my life unbalanced, not focusing on the spiritual void in my life. One of the first things I learned was the wonderful power of prayer. This was a daily routine at the lodge. We would smudge at the beginning and end of everyday as well as in the sharing circle. We smudged with the four powerful medicines: sweet grass, tobacco, cedar and sage. Smudging was a way for us to purify ourselves. Once again back to the Medicine Wheel purifying our Spirits, Mind, Body and our Hearts as well as the way we speak and think. I learned to use my voice which for so long I felt I did not have due to the fact that I stayed silent about my feelings of guilt and shame. I learned that I had a powerful voice when I used it in a good way. I learned very powerful, healthy ways to express myself through a few spiritual outlets. The most powerful was to learn smudging, speaking to Creator, asking for the guidance and help I desperately needed as well as giving thanks to Creator and Mother Earth for making it through another day. I also learned to use my voice for drumming and singing, an outlet I still use today to feel more connected to Mother Earth and Creator. I am so grateful to the lodge for these wonderful feelings of being reborn through what is known as a "Sweat Lodge". It has been awhile since I've had a sweat, however, I am so grateful to the lodge for setting me free from the feelings of guilt, shame and secrets by using my voice once again. It is with that voice that I hold my head up high and share my personal testimonial with Aboriginal communities today on what it is like to live with the disease of HIV. Meegwetich Creator gave me the strength to share my personal story and experiences today, for this is a big step up for me! Positive for five years and going strong!

Dawn Cameron

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Finding Our Experience of Spirit

For many people, there is a big disconnect when you say the word “spiritual” because it is associated with religion. But in facing life and death with HIV/AIDS, it is a difficult topic to avoid. In the community support work of the AIDS Bereavement Project, we work with the “spiritual” as a very personal part of self, within a holistic health model. We want to help people to create balance in their lives by considering the importance of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual factors, and to define the right balance for themselves.

One way to find or strengthen our connection to our ‘spirit’ is to sort out the rest – like a process of elimination. The easiest thing to do first is to separate from the physical – “the state of my body doesn’t express my spirit”. Next, separate from the mental – “the things I think about, from grocery lists to medication directions, do not express my spirit”. The harder exercise is to separate from the experience of emotional patterns – “the roller coaster of feelings I move through (on an hourly/daily/weekly basis) do not express my spirit” .

What’s left??? Just the fact of looking inside ourselves and caring to ask the next question will tell us more about our own spirit. When people look inside, they often describe their spirit using words like awareness, awakens, creativity, and unconditional love. We can identify the elements of our being that hold the greatest value for us, which can’t be identified as a thing or a behaviour, but which show who we are in the world.

We can reflect on our lives and look at how we express love and relate to others who we care for. We may notice qualities in our relating that are distinct from how others have treated us. These qualities are an expression of our spirit.

Because activity and interaction tend to engage our bodies, minds and emotions, the most common way that people open up to spiritual awareness is when they are alone or silent in a group. Specific things to calm the body and mind include being out in nature or sitting still and breathing deeply. Taking the time to notice subtle feelings is often easier when you first wake up or at the end of the day.

The part of us that doesn’t show up on a blood cell count or a ‘to do’ list or as dread in the pit of our stomachs is a quiet strength resting deep inside. It can be a reserve to draw from as we face the constant change in the other parts of our being. How do you experience and express your spirituality?

Anna Demetrakoupoulos

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen

Yes, I believe this statement. It is my way of life. Living by Faith through God’s Grace. God is not a visible being, but He is very real. He is the Presence that surrounds me daily, keeping me safe and comforted.

Knowing about God is a great privilege, but the most wonderful experience one can ever have is to know Him personally. I can say this with assurance because I am living it.

God (the Creator) is the reason why I’m alive today. He has guided me through many difficulties - over “high mountains” and across “wide valleys”. Even through the valley of Death.

He is my strength, my provider, and my burden bearer. When sadness fills my life, He is there to comfort. When doubt and fear arise, I am reminded of His yesterdays, millions of years ago, He is the same today.

He is the Light in my darkest hour. He is the One who taught me how to live happily and to love unconditionally. He is a father, a brother, and best friend to any and all who love Him.

My greatest experience with Him was in November of 2000. “Big tumour deep in the brain” (according to a doctor’s report). I lost mobility on my left side. Excruciating pain, hallucinations and comas.....It was a difficult time for the doctors since I refused all treatment, including an operation. I was not afraid. The greatest One was with me.

I never doubted God’s love. I knew He would be there because He promised help in time of trouble. I need not do anything. Why? Because effective, fervent prayers of the righteous were

going up for me. Shortly after, my tumour disappeared. I will never forget this chapter of my life and how my Saviour rescued me from the cold hands of Death. This is just the introduction of a very long testimony.

Walking in the Light.

Exploring our spiritual nature

Life is unpredictable at times, a roller coaster of disappointments and joys, pain and forgiveness, losses and gains, sickness and health, love and resentment.

The key to getting through, regardless of the situation, is having peace in your spirit, deep inside, a peace no one or no situation can shake or take away from you. A peace that assures you that no matter what happens, you are not alone and you can make it.

If you are like me you have probably wondered at times if anyone could really know the depth of pain you experience or answer the questions that run so deep when you are alone, or feel alone, or if anyone can really understand or care about your feelings when you can't even articulate them clearly. Are you ever afraid or anxious about how on earth you will face the trials, whether financial, relational, health etc., or how to balance the stresses of life and cope with the madness around you and sometimes within you? Have you asked the question "what is life is all about?" Or asked... "why?" Or... "what is my purpose and where do I find meaning?" Have you considered how to keep standing or start standing with your head held high, believing that your life has reason, value and significance, though you are living with an illness that invites such discrimination and stigma.

Allow me to pause here and shout so loud that they hear me in Hawaii:

"There is no shame. You are not your illness. You are more than this illness. God has created you and has a plan for your life. You are not an accident, or merely occupying space on this planet, you are a child of God, with a right

to be here, be heard, contribute, give love and be loved. Don't let others or your own self-doubts rob you of your hopes, dignity, purpose, beauty and value".

Exploring our spiritual nature invites us to explore the meaning of life, love, death, existence, value and faith. It is a silent yearning within, longing to be expressed and explored, loved and nurtured. It is the inner voice, often neglected, but when listened to, it will offer you a refuge, a safe place to reflect, to be still and find replenishment for your soul and perspective for your life. Your spirit will connect you with the greatest love of all...God, while connecting you with yourself. Start on your spiritual journey or nurture the path you've already begun; it is the path to healing, hope, love and meaning. No one is meant to journey alone, we need each other, and we need faith, love and hope.

If you want someone to talk to about your spiritual concerns, please contact Rev. Rauni Salminen at The Philip Aziz Centre.

*Hope means to keep living amid desperation
and to keep humming in the darkness.*

*Hoping is knowing that there is love,
it is trust in tomorrow*

it is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises.

*In the midst of a gale at sea,
it is to discover land.*

*In the eyes of another it is to see that you are
understood*

As long as there is still hope

There will also be prayer....

And you will be held in God's hands.

Rev. Rauni Salminen

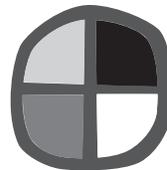
Dialogue IV: Knowledge Exchange

A conference for HIV+ women
& our health care providers

May 28th and 29th, 2005

The fourth provincial Dialogue conference for HIV+ women on health issues that affect us is fast approaching. Planning for the conference has been happening in earnest and we are getting excited about the workshops and activities that will be taking place over the last weekend in May. Some of the great things you'll see include workshops on pregnancy, new medications, alternative and complementary medicine, Aboriginal traditional medicine, depression, access to health care for refugee women, and advocacy skills building around health care issues. There will also be volunteers offering massages, makeovers, aromatherapy, and maybe even dance lessons....

The conference will be a chance for us as HIV+ women to discuss and strategize around the issues we face in taking care of ourselves and our health. It will also be a chance for us to connect with some of the health care providers in our communities to let them know how they can better serve us. Through open dialogue and discussion, we hope Dialogue IV will be a place for all participants to share knowledge and work together towards increasing access to effective health care for HIV+ women across the province.



We are now ready to start registering HIV+ women to attend! You will find enclosed with this newsletter a two-sided registration form. Fill out both sides and send it to Voices by mail, fax or email. If you need help filling out the form, call us at the Voices office. All the contact information is listed on the registration form.

See you at Dialogue IV!!! For more information, call Danielle at Voices 416 324-8703 or 1 800 263-0961 x26.

May 27th, 2005

L.I.G.H.T. (Living In Good Health Together) Conference

A conference for HIV+ women ex-prisoners, a partnership between PASAN and Voices of Positive Women in connection with the Dialogue IV Conference

PASAN (Prisoners AIDS Support Action Network) is planning a conference for HIV+ women who have been in prison. This conference will be held the day before the Dialogue IV conference, on Friday, May 27th. We hope that women who attend this conference will continue on to participate in the Dialogue IV conference for the rest of the weekend. The planning for this day's program is currently underway. For more information or to get

The only way to bring peace to the Earth is to learn to make our own lives peaceful

When Claudia asked me to write this piece on how Buddhism has impacted my life, I immediately said yes I welcomed the opportunity to share how my life has changed since the Buddha tapped me on the shoulder about eight years ago and whispered, 'It's time to wake up'.

The Buddha lived over 2500 years ago in India. His teachings are also known as the Dharma and are rooted in compassion, non-violence and respect for all living beings.

The foundation of the Dharma are the four noble truths:

- 1) suffering exists
- 2) the origin of suffering is attachment to desires
- 3) suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases
- 4) freedom from suffering is possible by practising the eightfold path. The eightfold path, which consists of the three qualities wisdom, morality, and meditation are: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right contemplation.

The basic aim in Buddhism is to help us gain insight into the truth of ourselves. We are invited to try out the teachings in our everyday lives and if they work for us then we can use them as our practice to benefit not only ourselves, but the lives of all other beings. If they don't work for us, we should cast them aside with no qualms.

The thing stirred up in me and my whole outlook on life shifted. The way I think, how I see and experience life

has changed and I now have practical tools for getting through the hard stuff and living more fully in the present. The Dharma is the lifeboat that helps me to keep going when the going gets rough and I feel like I'm sinking from the weight of the suffering in the world.

The first noble truth in Buddhism, that life is suffering, I know too well - growing up in an abusive home, being a survivor of childhood and adult sexual assault, working with women in prison, PHAs and survivors of rape and sexual violence and most recently doing grief and bereavement work with moms who are healing and rebuild their lives since their sons were murdered.

Buddhism is helping me to continue the process of waking up while living more fully with whatever life brings my way. Where I used to deny, cover up or try to avoid the reality of suffering, the pain, shame, fears and sadness, etc., I now use those same feelings and experiences, as compost, to generate Metta. Metta is the Sanskrit word for loving kindness which is really unconditional love for all beings. Karuna is the word for compassion which means to increase my ability to feel with, instead of for, those who have suffered and continue to experience pain and suffering in their lives.

Buddhism has been the way for me to stop being lost and confused. I no longer waste precious time trying to create the illusion of the life I would like to be living. The second noble truth states that the origin of suffering is attachment to desires. I try not spend time grasping on to the life I wish I had, and instead my energies are focused on working on being in right relation with the life I have.

The way of the Buddha is an ever-deepening learning process of living moment to moment with carefulness, attentiveness and mindfulness. Which is really about being on guard so that when negative (desire/attachment, or anger/aversion) emotions or thoughts arise I am able to catch myself. The aim is to train my mind so that I am always being careful in my thoughts, words and actions. How am I doing on this journey? Sometimes I catch myself and other times I don't. Waking up is hard work! I am really glad to

cont'd from page 5

journey? Sometimes I catch myself and other times I don't. Waking up is hard work! I am really glad to have the Buddha's reminder, that in anything we do, we must always keep a beginner's mind. Knowing that we will stumble and fall as we move through life, he reminds us that we can always start where we are and try again. During those times when I don't catch myself in time and I give in to desire (craving and clinging) or anger (aversion, or some other disturbing attitude towards myself or others), I try to be gentle with myself and not create more suffering by giving into self-blame and judgements. Instead I try to practice patience and self-acceptance with myself and others, to remind myself that it took many lifetimes for me to create the causes and conditions (Karma) of my present life and naturally it will take many lifetimes to clean it up.

This way of viewing life brings me peace of mind. There is no guilt or judgements in Buddhism, it's more about knowing our human nature, that we are not perfect and neither is the world we live in. That everything is impermanent and just as happy moments pass by, so too will painful or sad moments. It's about letting go of worry, not getting caught up in clinging to the happy moments or rejecting those that are painful. And it's about remembering to breathe and meet all of life's offerings with grace and ease.

Groundlessness

The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people,

Experiencing everything totally without mental reservations and blockages so that one never withdraws or centralizes into oneself.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Chris Leanord

Are you a Diva?

Then come to the DIVAS fundraiser!

Dear Members, As we hope you've heard, Voices is having our annual fundraiser called DIVAS. This year, the theme is DIVAS, and it's going to be a lot of fun with great music, people dressed up as DIVAS like Madonna, Tina Turner.. and prizes for the best costumes!

It's really important that Voices members take part in the event because the funds we raise directly support programs for us such as the treatment fund, the women's retreat, and the Peer Network program.

You can help raise money for the DIVAS fundraiser by collecting pledges (donations) from people you know. Even if the pledges are small amounts – such as \$5 – they can really add up! Many of our top earning dancers from last year's fundraiser raised over \$100 this way! Some suggestions for people to ask for pledges are your family, friends, co-workers, counsellors, doctors, and neighbours. Voices asks that you raise at least \$50 in pledges in order to get into the fundraiser free, but if you aren't able to raise this much, let us know and you will still be let into the event. People who raise over \$100 will get a special gift, but any amount of money – no matter how much - counts!

You will find a pledge form along with this letter. Start asking people now for pledges – there is only 2 months until the fundraiser!

Call us at Voices if you need more information.

We hope to see you there, and don't forget if you like you can wear your best DIVAS costume!

Danielle

Voices is Moving May 1st !

Well we have definitely outgrown our space at Voices! Our nursing clinic has had to move to Casey House because our room kept getting smaller and smaller. We have heard concerns from members about moving anywhere too identifying so we have had the opportunity to move right next door to Suite # 104 at the same 66 Isabella location. We'd have more space and a kitchen!

Some members have been wonderful enough to volunteer to help us pack! Give us a call if you are available the week before May 1st.

Welcome to Sista's of UZIMA

I have put together a new chat group/forum via YAHOO Chat Groups – Sista's of UZIMA. The development of this group is in keeping with the feedback that came out the March 5th forum for service users. The participants who attended this forum have requested the creation of a chat service separate from the message board on the UZIMA Website.

This chat forum will enable HIV+ African and Caribbean women to discuss health and social issues within a supportive and empowering online community. Women, who are interested in joining, will be required to register with an email address. For confidentiality purposes, their email address will not be displayed when posting a message or chatting on line. I have contacted a few volunteers involved with this project to promote this group in their circles. The chat group info is also available on the UZIMA Website. I urge you to promote this chat group to the women within your agency. With the conclusion of the UZIMA Project at the end of the month, I think this chat group will encourage a continuous dialogue for the women who have been involved with the project.

Nadine Reid

This is the group information:

Group Home Page: <http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/uzima>

Sista's of UZIMA email address: uzima@yahoogroups.ca

Post message: uzima@yahoogroups.ca

Subscribe: uzima-subscribe@yahoogroups.ca

Unsubscribe: uzima-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.ca

List owner: uzima-owner@yahoogroups.ca

For more information contact Nadine Reid

Peer-Advocate Project Coordinator, The Uzima Project

nreid@pwatoronto.org

416 506.1400 x634

First step out of isolation

In response to the need for many women from Ethiopia/Somalia and Eritrea. Voices of Positive Women would like to provide an opportunity for women to speak to each other in an anonymous environment. Through the years at Voices we have spoken to many HIV positive women that are too terrified to come to any groups at any AIDS Service organizations for fear of meeting other women from Ethiopia/Somalia and Eritrea because of the stigma and discrimination that they may encounter in their own community.

A Voices member from Eritrea would like to bring women together on a special Telelink Session to speak to women about her experience living with HIV. She is open about her status but understands that women are afraid of being identified as HIV positive in the Ethiopia/Somali/Eritrea community.

If you are a woman from Ethiopia/Somalia, Eritrea and are interested in getting together anonymously on Telelink with a group of women please contact Claudia at extension #25. You do not have to use your own name just use a made up name! Claudia will give you a 1 800 # to call, a password and the date and time of the call which is only given to participants of the group.

Make that first step out of isolation and meet other HIV positive women that understand the particular issues that Ethiopia/Somali and Eritrea women face every day.

We will be offering this opportunity in partnership with Astir from U.C.A.N. Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention who will be helping facilitate the call.



Treatment Corner

Protecting your Kidneys

Are you at risk?

Do you have a family history of kidney disease?

Do you have diabetes?

Do you have high blood pressure?

Are you a senior?

Is your ethnic origin Aboriginal, Asian, South Asian, Pacific Island, Caribbean, African, or Hispanic?

If you answered yes to anyone of these, you may be at increased risk of developing Chronic Kidney Disease. In addition, just being HIV-positive or taking certain medications may put us at increased risk of kidney disease.

Why this article?

I recently switched from Zerit to Viread on the advice of my doctor. Many of you may also be on Viread because the latest treatment guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend Viread as part of the nuke backbone of antiretroviral therapy. I was worried that Viread might hurt my kidneys because it is a member of a family of drugs that can cause kidney dysfunction, however it was approved by Health Canada based on clinical trials that showed no significant kidney damage.

Recently, at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Boston, February 22-25, some researchers began to question how we measure kidney damage, and the rate of kidney damage caused by HIV, Viread and other anti-HIV drugs. By only testing serum creatinine, as we currently

do, we may be missing some people with HIV who are at risk for chronic kidney disease, especially women and those over 50. I decided to find out if there was anything I could do to protect my kidneys. I wanted to share what I learned with you.

Our Kidneys

We have two kidneys, located in the back, one on either side of the spine, below the ribcage. They are about the size of your fist, and shaped like a kidney bean. Each kidney has about a million tiny blood-filtering units. Every day, the kidneys filter about 200 litres of fluid from the blood. From this, about two litres are sent to the bladder in the form of urine.

The kidneys have four main functions:

- ⦿ Balancing body fluids
- ⦿ Balancing body chemicals, such as potassium, needed for nerve and muscle control, and calcium, phosphorus and magnesium in your blood.
- ⦿ Removal of waste products, like urea (from the breakdown of protein from the foods you eat) and creatinine (formed by normal muscle activity).
- ⦿ Production of essential hormones, including those which help:
 - + regulate blood pressure
 - + make red blood cells
 - + maintain healthy bones

Testing for Kidney Damage

There are usually no symptoms of kidney disease until the damage is severe. That is why it's important to be tested. There is a urine test for protein (for albumin to creatinine ratio) and a blood test for creatinine.

Doctors and researchers normally use the creatinine test to measure kidney function, but a study at CROI (Poster 819) suggests that the creatinine test results

may not be enough on their own: the creatinine test results should be used in a mathematical equation or formula to calculate the estimated glomerular filtration rate (estGFR). There are two well-known equations used to calculate estGFR in adults: Cockcroft-Gault and the MDRD Study. Becker and his colleagues compared serum creatinine to estGFR (using the MDRD equation) in more than 1600 patients in the U.S., analysing data from CHORUS, a large, observational cohort. Using the creatinine test, none of the 136 women in the study showed kidney dysfunction, but using the estGFR equation, 10 (7%) of them had moderate kidney disease. In the 307 people over 50 years of age, the creatinine test results indicated 12 (4%) had moderate kidney disease, but the estGFR showed that 66 (21%) did.

The National Kidney Foundation recommends that adults who are at risk of kidney disease should use the calculator available on their website at www.kidney.org to determine their estGFR. They are concerned that many people may be in the early stages of Chronic Kidney Disease and not know it. You can ask your doctor to calculate your estimated GFR, or if you know your creatinine level you can use the GFR calculator at the National Kidney Foundation website. It uses an abbreviated form of the MDRD equation. http://www.kidney.org/kls/public/gfr_calculator.cfm. You fill in your creatinine test result, your age, whether you are black or white, and your gender to estimate your GFR. Check the box for umols/l when inputting your creatinine level because that is the international system unit that we use to measure creatinine; in the U.S. they use mg/dL. If the GFR is less than 60, you should discuss this with your doctor. You might need to change your drug dosages and pay more attention to other health conditions that cause kidney damage like high blood pressure and diabetes. Remember, this calculator is a screening tool to inexpensively identify patients at risk for Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD). estGFR is not an absolute lab test result. It is only an estimate of kidney function.

What is Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)?

CKD is defined as the presence of kidney damage, or decreased level of kidney function, for a period of three months or more. It is divided into five stages. Not all people progress from Stage 1 to Stage 5. In the

later stages people may have some of the following symptoms:

- + more fatigue, less energy
- + trouble thinking clearly
- + poor appetite
- + trouble sleeping
- + dry, itchy skin
- + muscle cramps at night
- + swollen feet and ankles
- + a need to urinate more often, especially at night
- + puffiness around the eyes, especially in the morning

In the final stage, known as End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD), the kidneys stop working and dialysis or a transplant is needed. Transplants are not yet done on people with HIV in Canada, though they are done in the U.S.

It is possible to prevent kidney disease or delay the progression, especially in people with high blood pressure, diabetes or cardiovascular disease, which are the leading causes of kidney failure. If you have some kidney damage, there are special treatments (including proper food choices and medications) that may help to delay kidney failure.

Prevention

To help prevent kidney damage:

- + have your urine, blood (including creatinine and cholesterol) and blood pressure checked regularly by your doctor
- + control high blood pressure (should usually be less than 130/80)
- + don't smoke
- + exercise regularly
- + maintain a healthy weight
- + avoid excess alcohol (more than one drink a day)
- + avoid street drugs
- + get enough sleep
- + avoid heavy or long-term use of painkillers such as aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) and Advil (ibuprofen). Low dose aspirin for heart disease is OK.

- + if you have diabetes, maintain good control of your blood sugar

For more information:

The National Kidney Foundation: www.kidney.org

The Kidney Foundation of Canada: www.kidney.ca

Maggie Atkinson is former co-chair of AIDS ACTION NOW! and the founding chair of Voices of Positive Women in Toronto.

The OPTIMA Trial for you?

Is your antiretroviral therapy failing you? Are you thinking of changing your regimen? Do you have a CD4 count below 300 and a viral load over 5,000?

Have you already used several anti-HIV drug combinations? Are you unsure what your options are now? Then the OPTIMA trial may be for you.

This study, which was designed by Dr. Bill Cameron of Ottawa, compares different options for treatment-experienced PWAs who are no longer benefiting from highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). The study aims to find out two things:

- Should you have a break from treatment before starting a new regimen?
- Is Mega HAART better than standard HAART? (Mega HAART is a regimen of five or more drugs.)

Although there have been a couple of treatment interruption studies, the results have been conflicting. According to the latest U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents, interruption of treatment is generally not recommended unless it is done in a clinical trial setting. It is hoped that the trial results will provide the basis and guidance for clearer recommendations.

Some doctors prescribe Mega HAART as a salvage regimen based on some small studies, but there has never been a controlled clinical trial comparing Mega HAART to the standard version. We don't know whether it really works better, or if it is more toxic in the long run.

You can help us find answers to these questions for yourself and others.

The OPTIMA study began in 2001 and now has over 300 participants worldwide. They hope to enrol 500 more by December 31, 2005. Of the 39 Canadians who have enrolled so far, only three are women. Volunteers who meet the study entry criteria are assigned randomly (like a flip of a coin) to one of the treatment options for about two years. Although the study decides randomly whether you would take standard or Mega HAART, and whether or not you would have a three-month treatment break, after a resistance test, you and your doctor choose which drugs you will take.

OPTIMA was declared safe and of continued clinical relevance by an independent, international data safety monitoring board in October 2004. This study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and is conducted by the Canadian HIV Trials Network.

The trial sites in Ontario are:

Hamilton: Dr. Fiona Smaill, McMaster

Kingston: Dr. Peter Ford, Queens University

London: Dr. Bill Thompson, St.. Joseph's Health Care Centre

Ottawa: Dr. Bill Cameron, Ottawa Hospital; Dr. Don Kilby, University of Ottawa Health Services

Toronto: Dr. Anita Rachlis, Sunnybrook; Dr. Sharon Walmsley, Toronto General Hospital; Dr. Colin Kovacs, Maple Leaf Clinic

For more information:

Optima Trial: <http://www.optimatrial.org/ca/>

The Canadian HIV Trials Network: www.hivnet.ubc.ca/ctn.html or 1 800.661.4664 (Sophie)

Maggie Atkinson is former co-chair of AIDS ACTION NOW and the founding chair of Voices of Positive Women in Toronto.

Resources

CATIE

Looking for treatment information? Having trouble finding local resources? Feeling overwhelmed? The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) is here for you. Let's talk.

Call anonymously: 1 800.263.1638

Visit our web site: www.catie.ca

E-mail treatment questions to: questions@catie.ca

Burlington

The Miriam Group

Child and Family Support is located in a small comfortable house, an ideal place for women's meetings, at 2464 Dundas Street, Burlington
T: 905 681.7157 or E: miriamgp@idirect.com.

Ottawa

The Living Room

is a drop-in centre that provides counselling and practical services to PHAs.
T: 613 563.0851 or 1 800 461.2182

The AIDS Committee of Ottawa

offers a wide range of individual, couple, and family counseling. ACO also runs a Women's Support Group for positive women.

For more information please call 613 238.5014

Guelph

AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County

Serodivergent Couples Support Group. This group is open to both men and women from all types of relationships (gay, bisexual, straight, lesbian, queer, trans) where one partner is positive and the other is negative.

For more information.

T: 519 763.2255

Greater Toronto Area

Africans in Partnership Against AIDS

T: 416 924.5256

Alliance for South Asian

AIDS Prevention

T: 416 599.2727

E: aids@interlog.com

www.asaap.ca

Asian Community AIDS Service

T: 416 963.4300

E: info@acas.org

www.acas.org

Languages spoken: Chinese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Vietnamese

Positive Women's Support Group

This group takes place the last Thursday of each month at: 6.00 PM at 519 Church Street Community Centre, 3rd Floor. It is co-sponsored by Hassle Free Clinic and Voices of Positive Women. TTC Tokens, Child Care Reimbursement, and snacks are provided.

For More information call Voices: 416 324.8703

2 Spirited People of the 1st Nations

T: 416 944.9300

E: info@2spirits.com

www.2spirits.com

Women's Health in Women's Hands

Languages Spoken: Bengali, Hindi, Spanish, Swahili, Twi, Urdu, West Indian dialects, Yoruba. Interpreters are provided for other languages not listed.

For More information: .416 593.7655

E: whiwh@web.ca

www.whiwh.com



Voices of Positive Women

66 Isabella Street, Suite 105

Toronto, ON M4Y 1N3

T 416 324.8703

F 416 324.9701

www.vopw.org

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Layout and Illustration: Beverly Deutsch

Editor: Kerry LeClair

We would like to give members of Voices of Positive Women an opportunity to contribute financially to our organization in any way they can—\$5, \$10 or whatever you are able to afford.

Questions? Contact Voices of Positive Women: 416 324.8703 or toll-free 1 800 263.0961

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