



AIDS Sends a Message

Editorial Comment by Warren Krug

(September-October, 2001)

Twenty years after the first official report of AIDS, the United Nations' top AIDS fighter has said the pandemic is still in its early stages.

Though more than 22 million people have died from AIDS and 36 million more are infected with the HIV virus, the disease could spread to countries that so far have avoided the worst of the disease. This gloomy assessment was made over the summer by Peter Piot, the head of UNAIDS.

More than 70% of people with the virus live in sub-Saharan Africa, but global health officials believe the disease could spread rapidly through countries like India, with a billion people, just as it has in South Africa where 11% of the population is now infected.

The surreptitious nature of the disease is defying efforts to cure it. Indeed, many experts think the focus should now be on helping people live with HIV more than trying to get rid of it.

AIDS researchers understand how HIV latches onto human blood cells, how it oozes inside and kills them. Now they also are beginning to learn how HIV taps into the memory of the body's immune system, lying inside cells that are programmed to do nothing but sit and wait.

These cells, called resting memory T cells, maintain a record of germs they encounter, helping the body be prepared the next time it sees the germs.

Since these memory cells live so long, up to 73 years, the HIV virus can survive just as long. All attempts to kill the cells so far have failed because the body does not recognize them as abnormal. And some researchers believe the body has other reservoirs where the HIV virus can remain hidden until ready to strike again.

It is hard not to see a message in all this. Because the vast majority of AIDS sufferers contract the disease through abuse of their own bodies (promiscuous sexual activity and drug abuse), the message seems to be clear: STOP ABUSING YOUR BODIES.

The connection is not unlike that between heavy smoking and lung cancer or alcoholism and cirrhosis (liver disease).

Avoiding temptation isn't always easy, but with God nothing is impossible. We respect our body as a gift from God. We aim for a healthy lifestyle in order to better serve Him in this life before entering the life beyond where there surely will be no AIDS or any other disease. *LSI*

—Warren Krug, editor