

BOOK REVIEW

HIV Pioneers: Lives Lost, Careers Changed, and Survival *by Wendee M Wechsberg (Editor)*

Paperback, 272 pages
Johns Hopkins University Press
May 2018

HIV Pioneers documents how over 30 years of the HIV epidemic, new AIDS cases and AIDS-related deaths have been reduced worldwide by multidisciplinary approaches. The book's main idea is to use inspirational vignettes from HIV researchers, leaders, survivors, family and friends to enliven the "tremendous strides" made in the prevention and treatment of HIV since the epidemic appeared early in the 1980s.

Analysis of HIV incidence in gay men, heterosexual men and women, heroin addicts, Haitians, psychiatric patients, haemophiliacs, and after needle-stick injury led to an understanding of the transmission of the virus and a change in funeral practices. Motivational research changed the behaviour of heroin addicts, encouraging needle-exchange and switching to methadone, and encouraged safer sexual practices for gay men. Knowledge of viral transmission by bodily fluids, e.g. from HIV-infected mothers to their babies, offered new ways of preventing spread.

The book covers the isolation of HIV by Dr. Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, shows the historical importance of early diagnosis and avoiding stigma in tackling global epidemics, and traces the development of drug treatments, including Interleukin-2 (IL-2), azidothymidine (AZT), highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) and recently once daily Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). It illustrates the horror of AIDS-related deaths: blindness, dementia, Kaposi's sarcoma, *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, and tuberculosis attacking the depleted immune system.

There are some superb quotes, such as "*when the vein gives out, the ass kicks in*" to describe a heroin addict's switch from intravenous to intramuscular injection. Kaposi's sarcoma lesions are the precursor of death: "*90lbs is checkout time*". And there are many powerful, harrowing personal narratives, although no account by a haemophiliac infected by HIV via blood transfusion.

Overall, the various contributions succeed in meeting the editor's stated aim of bringing to life the realities of the AIDS epidemic. However, the book assumes that the reader has good understanding of many of the technical details. A scientific summary of the known facts about HIV – sero-conversion to AIDS, how the virus enters cells, the viral DNA integrates into the cell's DNA and the virus then re-emerges, and how HIV originated – would have been useful.

Anyone interested in science, social history, communicable diseases or epidemiology would benefit from reading this topical, fascinating and inspirational book.

Fay Hartley
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