



Tuesday November 4, 2014 12:01 AM
By [Matthew Nojiri](#)

Dick Keiser Jr. remembers telling his mom and dad that he had HIV.

He said when he returned home to Berks County in 2010, his parents, Richard and Virginia, were surprised that he did not appear sicker, or worse, on the verge of death.

"Their reaction was come home and we'll take care of you while you die," said Keiser, 70, a native of Wyomissing Hills living in Florida.

More than four years later, Keiser chuckles when he tells the story, since he's far from dead. In fact, one of his doctors predicts he'll be alive for many years. As an example, in September, he cycled 330 miles in Maine. The other riders had no idea about his HIV status until he told them at the end of the journey.

Keiser, a 1962 Wyomissing High School graduate, recently published a book, "Everything a Gay Man Needs to Know About HIV, Sex and Staying Healthy," that he hopes will help others, particularly when it comes to protecting themselves from the virus and what it's like to live with it.

While people with HIV are living much longer than the early days of the virus, Keiser stresses it is still a huge problem, with new infections remaining steady at 50,000 every year.

"I want to make this epidemic more visible," Keiser said.

Why'd you decide to write a book?

Writing a book was a grueling process, Keiser said. He thought it would only take six months, but it ended up taking two and a half years.

HIV by the numbers

More than 1.1 million in the U.S. live with HIV.

180,900 people, or 1 in 6, are unaware of their infection.

The incidence rate has remained stable in recent years, with 50,000 new infections a year.

15,529 people with AIDS died in 2010.

Overall, 636,000 people with an AIDS diagnosis have died.

Source: Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

He said he had to rewrite chapters as "PrEP" or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis started getting attention earlier this year. PrEP helps prevent HIV infection through a regimen of a daily pill known to block the infection combined with other reduction strategies such as safe sex.

Keiser said it's important to note reducing your risk for HIV is not a "do-it-yourself plan." Those who identify that they are at higher risk should work with their doctor to come up with a plan to reduce that risk.

Still, Keiser said the medical world can be hard for anyone to navigate, and he said he wanted to offer some clarity through his book.

"I've translated all the jargon into layman's terms," he said.

He said getting tested every three to six months and identifying when you're at risk for HIV are both critical.

"The people that need to read this aren't aware that they need to read it," Keiser said.

Where do things stand in fight against HIV?

The good news for those diagnosed with HIV in 2014 is that advances in HIV drugs have helped people live longer. Keiser is 70 and says he feels great.

Keiser said the medical advances have halted some of the urgency that's necessary to kill the virus. Keiser said people see him and can't believe he has HIV.

"I would be a better spokesman for the cause if I appeared really sick, and people could be motivated by the need to help me live," Keiser said. "But if you're med-compliant and live healthy, nobody would ever know I'm HIV positive."

Years ago, HIV and AIDS were a discussion point on the nightly news. Keiser said the recent chaos and flurry of headlines over a few cases Ebola virus in the U.S. have illustrated his point. HIV and AIDS do not get that kind of attention.

"It's not recognized anywhere as a problem," Keiser said of HIV.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data indicated new HIV infections have stayed level in recent years, with about 50,000 new infections per year.

He said HIV could be erased soon if people committed to the effort, with funding and research and more awareness about risk reduction.

"It's a nonsustainable epidemic, and we could crush it in five years," Keiser said.

How does HIV affect your life?

It's been almost five years since Keiser was diagnosed with HIV in late 2009. Keiser said the diagnosis was tough to take at first, but he turned a corner once he accepted the medications would be a part of his life.

"In two weeks I decided the drugs were helping me live rather than killing me," he said. "I have no side effects."

Part of his book deals with managing the medication regimen and helping guide others through that process.

"It's a lot of work managing HIV," he said.

He said he tried the HIV support groups but they didn't work for him, making him feel like a victim. He said the virus does not hold him back.

He said he did not tell anyone during the six-day, 330-mile cycling trip through Maine to show how much he could do while living with HIV.

"I wanted to prove to myself that I could do more than a 40-year-old could do," he said. "I decided to do this crazy Maine bike ride and be an athlete."

Anything else?

Keiser said he hopes people reading his story will know that it's OK to talk about HIV and the things gay men need to do to protect themselves and live healthy.

"That's why I'm sort of hoping that this story about a gay man being comfortable talking about his status might help other people be more comfortable talking about it and make it less invisible," Keiser said.

He said the book is only part of his effort to get that message out. He's planning presentations, working with the medical community to create programs to manage HIV and being an advocate in the effort to kill the virus once and for all.

He said that work never stops.

"Once we finish a project, I'm already on to the next project," he said

Article appeared <http://readingeagle.com/life/article/berks-native-dick-keiser-jr-writes-a-book-about-living-with-hiv>