



A Word from WISE

The December 1999 issue of WISE Words described some concerns of women dealing with drug side effects. The enclosed publication offers a more complete discussion of how to monitor and manage side effects and highlights unique issues facing women.



There are things you can do to lessen the impact of side effects. Perhaps the most important thing is learning how to identify early signs and symptoms of drug toxicity. Equally important is developing ways to lower the chance of experiencing them in the first place. That way you're not surprised or unprepared if they do occur. Sometimes that's as easy as keeping rice, ibuprofen or Benadryl on hand.

Like anything else, you don't have to grin and bare side effects. Talk to your doctor about how you're feeling and the symptoms you're having. Talk to other people taking HIV therapies about what they do to prevent and treat their side effects. Give some of the enclosed side effect management tips a try. Finally, let us know what works for you. It might help someone else down the line!

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More on Gender and Viral Load

Back in March of 1999, WISE Words explored the issue of gender differences in HIV levels. This issue came to the forefront back in December 1998 when a study reported that women may progress to AIDS with half the viral level of men. Since then, conflicting findings about possible differences in viral load between women and men have emerged.

Earlier this year Project Inform co-sponsored a meeting with the National Institute of Health's Office of AIDS Research and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to determine whether there is enough evidence to support claims that there is a gender difference in viral load. Participating in the meeting were HIV researchers, physicians and women living with HIV.

Based on an extensive research review, meeting participants concluded that observed differences in viral load are real and present in early stages of HIV infection and disease. These differences may lessen or disappear within five years after initial HIV infection, however.

The significance of these differences remains unknown. Because of this and because there is increasing debate about the best time to start anti-HIV therapy, the meeting concluded that, at this time, recommendations for treating HIV-positive women should not be changed. In essence, recommendations should remain the same for both men and women. However, participants agreed that discussion of these differences should be greatly expanded in the Federal Guidelines for using anti-HIV therapy and should be taken into consideration when starting treatment.

There were other interesting findings presented at the meeting. For more information on this meeting, see "Meeting Explores Gender Differences in Viral Load" in Project Inform's most recent PI Perspective, available by calling Project Inform's HIV/AIDS Treatment Hotline at 1-800-822-7422, or see the article on our website at www.projectinform.org

What Else Is WISE Up To?

Several projects and publications are currently in progress and will be coming your way. We're putting the finishing touches on a couple of new publications, including one that focuses on getting in tune with how women feel emotionally and physically. We're also working on a paper on preventing and treating a condition very common in positive women—candidiasis (yeast infections). So stay tuned!

We're on Our Way to South Africa!

This July we'll be heading off to Durban, South Africa, for the 13th International AIDS Conference. Rumor has it that there will be special attention paid to issues uniquely impacting women living with HIV. These issues will likely deal with mother-to-child transmission and prevention issues as they are particularly important in developing countries where access to therapy is limited. Issues presented at the conference that are of importance to women, including but not limited to pregnancy issues, will be reported on in the upcoming PI Perspective and WISE Words. Keep your eye out for it!

More Information on HIV Testing

On the policy front, the issue of HIV testing of pregnant women and newborns is still very much on the political agenda. There is a great deal of controversy over protecting the rights and choices of women and what is right in terms of early identification of HIV in managing pregnancy and preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission. Implications of any laws which might govern routine HIV testing of pregnant women are very complex and may impact the way many women learn about their HIV status. This may have further implications about how they choose to treat (or not treat) their HIV down the line.

WISE Words en Español!

We're very excited that WISE Words will debut in Spanish this year! Of course, Project Inform has been translating many of our publications in Spanish for years, making them available on the web or over the hotline (including this publication). However, this will be the first time we will actually have a Spanish publication that women living with HIV and service providers can sign up to receive regularly. It will include translated articles of WISE Words, plus special articles and features for Latinas. As always, the publication is free of charge.



If you would like to receiving WISE Words in Spanish, please call 415-558-8669 x231 or 800-822-7422 and request to be placed on the Spanish WISE Words mailing list. Or email us with that request at support@projectinform.org. Please specify if you would only like to receive Spanish versions or both Spanish and English. Gracias!

We're busy sorting through all of these tough issues and are developing materials that describe them and our own opinions. If you're interested in learning more about the issue of HIV testing of pregnant women and newborns, contact Project Inform's Treatment Action Network (TAN) by calling 415-558-8669 x224 or you can email us at tan@projectinform.org.

It's easy to get treatment information!

1-800-822-7422

Project Inform's toll-free National HIV/AIDS Treatment Hotline is available six days a week:

**M - F, 9AM - 5PM
Saturdays, 10AM - 4PM**