

The outbreak of the hiv virus, aids in 1980s

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Who would have ever thought that a disease, possibly brought to America by infected African monkeys, would affect the country forever? This is exactly what happened in the late nineteenth century when the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was introduced to America. The unpredictable epidemic caused a huge outrage for years to come. The outbreak of the HIV virus, AIDS, in the early 1980" s resulted in medical research, public misconceptions, and ultimately growing awareness. Appearing first only in homosexual men, AIDS was an unfamiliar virus to the entire United States. Reports of unknown and unexplainable symptoms caused much confusion among patients and even doctors. In 1981, the first reports explained that 41 homosexual men in the San Fransisco area had "... a rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer" (Altman n. p.). After years of researching these cases and millions of others appearing later in the decade, scientists discovered that it was not cancer they were dealing with.

They called it HIV (Human Immune Virus) which leads to AIDS (Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome) that "... rogressively destroys the body" s ability to fight infections and certain cancers" (ARIC n. p.). With minimal research there was nothing to initially " combat" the virus; but, thanks to time and funding, there were some drugs that seemed to help stop the spread of the virus in ones body. These anti-retroviral drugs still don't constitute as cures ! for the virus, but have definitely helped and continue to help patients live longer (ARIC n. p.). Since a vaccine to "... evoke an immune system response that will prevent infection or disease development" still has not been found, other treatments have been tested.

Accupuncture, stressmanagement, hypnosis, exercise, good nutrition, and an overall positive attitude all seem to alleviate symptoms even if they are not proven cures of the virus (Packer 78-88). Although AIDS is a life threatening disease, there were many people living with it by keeping healthy and staying safe. Scott Fried had not tried any of the antiviral drugs; however, practices such as taking 80 herbs and vitamins a day, staying physically fit, visiting the doctor every three months, and being happy have kept him alive with the virus for thirteen years (Fried speech).

Most victims have not lived as long as he which is why AIDS has led to some extensive research. Investigators supported by private and public funds continued to search for a cure or even an explanation of HIV/AIDS for two decades because like the "black plague", AIDS has killed off millions of people in a short time. Also like the black plague did, AIDS carried with it a long string of misconceptions. In the Middle Ages anyone carrying the "black plague" was to be avoided. Similarly, the public would often avoid people with AIDS.

There were fabrications that AIDS could be caught by another human being from sneezing, coughing, hugging, kissing or even any "casual contact"; so, people stayed away from those who were infected by AIDS. Another lie was that AIDS was caused by something magical or mystical (Taylor 23-24). Though some were overly careful of "catching" the virus, others were not careful enough. Since the initial outbreak was among gay men it was simply assumed that only gay men could be affected. Then reports of IV drug users having the disease still seemed to eliminate the chance of the common person being infected.

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Next, hemophiliacs and people who had had blood transfusions were reported followed by blacks, Hipics, lesbians, straight women and finally white, heterosexual, males. Still everyone said " It can" t happen to me," until it did (Fried speech). This assumption that AIDS only affected few amounts of people and only minorities was the basis of all misconceptions about that virus. People did not believe the virus could have any impact on their lives; but, it did impact everyones lives directly and or indirectly.

Now that " AIDS is the second leading cause of death in the United States among people aged 25 to 44" (ARIC n. p.), the misconceptions have been proven to be false. Although it was statistically correct that 66% of people infected by AIDS were homosexual males, 24% were IV drug users, and only 4% were heterosexual males or females (Packer 17) it was still a fact that AIDS can affect anyone. After years of research and statistical reports there were finally people relaying these messages to the public.

Motivational speakers, like Scott Fried, continue to reach out to teens and adults about AIDS and sex. Information about these subjects can also be found easily, not only at hospitals or doctors" offices; but in books, magazines, pamphlets, and even on the internet. Conducting a simple search on <http://www.yahoo.com> came up with 164 " category matches," 1,206 " web site matches," and 237,000 web page matches. This means that HIV/AIDS appears at least 238,370 times on th! e world wide web and it shows that AIDS in an important component ofmodern life.

Not only are people becoming aware of the AIDS epidemic, but they are becoming aware of sexuality through learning about AIDS. Before the

outbreak of this fatal virus sex was only spoken about discretely. Now even kids are being made aware of the dangers of sex and spreading HIV. In this way HIV/AIDS had a positive affect on the country. People are aware of the facts and probably make better decisions. Some experts have said that AIDS will remain the way it is now and others predict it growing into a " huge epidemic" (Taylor 28).

Hopefully due to this expansion of knowledge and recognition, he AIDS virus will not spread as quickly and infect as many people as it has in the past. HIV positive, homosexual, male, Scott Fried, said, " Ironically one of the blessings that HIV/AIDS has brought me is the abundance of love. . . " and perhaps that is true. Pertaining to the eighties and the early onset of the virus, AIDS caused much more commotion than love. However, every cloud has a silver lining and the hysteria has finally cleared up some myths. It has opened up the public to not only HIV/AIDS awareness, but sexual cognizance as well.