

THE PARADOX OF LIVING WITH HIV

By Felix and Paula Sirls

While our commitment to finding ways to manage HIV/AIDS continues, increasingly we need to find ways to treat a broader range of conditions associated with the disease process. With depression, addictions, inflammatory ailments, menopause, hepatitis, cancers, respiratory problems and others, we must find ways to help ourselves cope with psycho/social disabilities, emotional distress, grief, anxiety, stress, but most of all, loss.

For persons who have contracted our illness, there are issues of adapting our lifestyles in a way that is healthy and fulfilling that automatically jump out. Many draw into themselves, thinking that this is the way to protect themselves. Then there are the issues of expectation when we speak about our condition—can I trust this person enough to tell them the truth without them divulging that information to someone else?

Depression is a factor in social isolation. How we accept ourselves and the methods we use to become comfortable is important. If we use drugs, or become comfortable with being depressed, we accent our condition, becoming disconnected from others, soaking in our sorrow, it is a crippling state of mind. Life stress is another issue, many times exacerbated by those who are there to assist, heal and help.

Let's talk about the clinics, doctors, social workers, case managers, where we get our services and what we have to go through to receive services. The frustration and the people we must encounter to get the things we need to survive. The medications that work in some ways and weaken in others. The disfigurement of the body, displaced body fat, rashes, bumps that pop out and recede at will, regurgitation, the runs, headaches, loss of balance and sight, forgetfulness—these are daily battles for the positive community.

What about the isolation of being disconnected from former friends and family, let alone lovers? Not being able to have a relationship with whoever we want or those who want to have a relationship with us also isolates.

Doing nothing about one's reality is also denial and isolation. Becoming disconnected from people, places and social activities are common factors with persons who are positive.