

Media Release

Count yourself lucky ... with PEP!

For immediate release, Friday 4th April, 2008
**Gay Men's Health, a program of
the AIDS Council of South Australia Inc.**
Telephone: (08) 8334 1606
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Count yourself lucky ... with PEP!

Adelaide-based writer Daniel G. Taylor first found out about PEP in 1997. "I was dating a doctor at the time," Daniel says. "He told me about this new drug that you could take if you thought you'd been exposed to HIV."

This story is quite typical of how gay and same sex attracted men have come to hear about PEP in the past: by some quirky coincidence.

So what is PEP?

PEP is a 4 week course of medication taken to prevent HIV infection after possible exposure to the virus, also called a risk episode. This may be through unprotected anal sex or vaginal sex, broken or slipped condoms during protected anal sex or vaginal sex, or sharing injecting equipment with someone who is or could be HIV Positive.

PEP is not a 'morning after pill' and not a vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS nor can it replace safe sex (using condoms and water-based lube) or safe injecting practices (not sharing needles and other injecting equipment).

PEP is not guaranteed to prevent HIV infection and will only be effective if started within 72 hours of possible exposure to the virus.

An awareness campaign aimed at gay and same sex attracted men in South Australia began in January 2008.

In 2006 Daniel needed PEP after a risk episode. He went to the Emergency Department of a major public hospital. After waiting for some time, he was seen by a doctor who took some blood tests. After looking at the tests, the doctor told Daniel he could go home.

Daniel asked about PEP. The doctor told him that it was the hospital's policy *not* to give out HIV drugs to people who were not HIV positive.

This made no sense to Daniel, but "she was the doctor and I was some dumb patient" Daniel believes was the doctor's perception.

This was on a Saturday, so on Monday morning he went to Clinic 275 and was prescribed PEP.

"(Staff) at Clinic 275 were mortified," Daniel says.

Daniel counts himself lucky because not only did he know about PEP, but he knew enough about the medical system to know who to turn to next.

The current PEP awareness campaign is not just about informing gay and same sex attracted men about PEP, but also about informing medical professionals about PEP as well. This includes staff at hospital Emergency Departments who often provide the first point of contact for people seeking PEP after risk episodes.

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While being on PEP for the required four weeks was no “quick fix” as Daniel describes it – “it was really overwhelming,” he says – it did mean that he did not contract HIV.

Now that PEP is becoming more widely known about, both with the gay and same sex attracted community *and* within the medical system, stories like Daniel's two years ago will be old news.

If you have any queries about PEP or believe you may need to access PEP call the PEP Hotline on 1800 022 226.

For more information on PEP visit the website at <http://www.acsa.org.au/PEP.html>

For information about HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs) call the Man2Man Info Line (a service of Gay Men's Health) on 8334 1617. Country callers should call 1800 671 582.