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HIV Then and Now – We’ve come a long way.

Interior Health has launched a new campaign to show how advances in HIV treatment and care have improved the lives of those living with the disease. The campaign aims to break down stereotypes that prevent people from being tested and accessing life-saving treatment.

The “HIV Then & Now” campaign builds on the momentum of Interior Health’s innovative “My Health is Sexy” campaign which was launched in December 2014. The “HIV Then and Now” campaign tells the stories of people who are living with HIV today. It puts faces to a disease that just 20 years ago, in the absence of effective treatment, often progressed to AIDS and equalled a death sentence. Today, people receiving treatment for HIV can expect to live long, healthy lives free of symptoms.

“For us to achieve an AIDS-free generation within our lifetime we need to address the stigma and fear related to HIV, says Dr. Trevor Corneil, Medical Health Officer with Interior Health. “Stigma stops people from being tested and starting treatment. This campaign shows how extraordinary advances in treatment have transformed HIV into a manageable disease that no longer needs to be feared.”

The campaign shares the stories of two B.C. men. Dale from Kamloops who was diagnosed with HIV in 2004 and Michael from Vancouver who was diagnosed in 2007.

“My life fell apart when I was first diagnosed with HIV. I refused treatment and gave up on my life because I thought I was already dead but I was wrong,” says Dale. “Once I started treatment, everything changed. I’m healthier than I’ve ever been. I own a home and a business and have been reunited with my family. Just three pills a day are all it’s taken to transform my life.”

“I was stunned, shocked, and traumatized when I was told I had HIV. I was scared that I would be constantly sick, either from HIV or from the medications I would have to take to suppress the virus,” says Michael. “Instead of being a death sentence, my HIV status has helped me turn my life around. And treatment has been easier than I ever imagined. I take one pill a day and have no side effects.”

Interior Health’s “HIV Then & Now” campaign is part of the innovative Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS (STOP HIV/AIDS) program, which aims to increase HIV testing rates, reduce HIV transmission and improve the health outcomes of those living with HIV. In British Columbia, it is estimated that approximately 3,500 people are living with HIV and are unaware of their status. The only way to know for sure if someone has HIV and to engage that person in treatment is through a test. Early diagnosis of HIV supports optimal health outcomes for infected individuals and reduces the likelihood of transmission to others. Since Interior Health launched the program in 2012, testing in the region has increased by 32 per cent.

For more information:

- Then and Now campaign: <http://myhealthissexy.com/then-and-now.php>
- My Health is Sexy Campaign: <http://www.myhealthissexy.com>
- STOP HIV/AIDS: <http://stophivaids.ca/>

About Interior Health

Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 742,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit www.interiorhealth.ca.

- 30 -