

TOWARDS LONGEVITY!

(the **XIII WORLD AIDS** Conference,
Durban, 2000)

(translated from Latvian)

Although the conference cost was 10 mln. \$, the gathering gave no special medical news – the main topic was access to ARVs in developing countries. E.g., *Boehringer- Ingelheim* came up with its initiative to provide women in pregnancy with its *Viramune* free of charge. This programme is available to Latvia as well.

The **new trend in AIDS medicine is longevity** – therapies that people could use for 30- 40 years. So the emphasis is no more on decreasing VL only.

The “lucky ones” who started ART right after getting infected may become **long- term non- progressors** after 4 weeks on treatment (abstr. LbPeA7020).

An interesting concurrence has been discovered by Japanese scientists, researching long term non- progressors. Most of them were haemophiliacs (infected >17 years). This is a significant message for genetics, vaccine research and prevention (TuPeC3370).

My conviction got confirmed: a constantly high **CD8** count is a guarantee for prolonged life (ThPeB5301).

Instead, CD4 and not the age, gender or VL is critical when starting therapy and its threshold is **CD4= 200!** (LbPe7050)

The initial enthusiasm on **STIs** has vanished. STI may be justified merely in cases of unbearable toxicities or in patients who initially started therapy too early (*The Hopkins HIV Report, IX. 2000*).

Long use of PIs may lead to lipodystrophy and death (WePeB4166).

Switching to e.g., EFV lowers VL and substantially increases CD4 counts (WePeB4188).

But nothing is perfect, and EFV may cause painful breast increase in 8% of patients.

Scientists are trying to **simplify ART regimens**. E.g., a PI- sparing combination NVP + EFV + ddl is administered once daily (TuPeB3207).

Remember - to miss a once daily dose is more dangerous!

Weight loss occurs even in patients on triple combinations and with an undetectable VL (TuPeC3399). Doctors are more and more recommending regular physical trainings!

And now, on complementary therapies!

H. S. Armisted recommends not forget multi vitamins and minerals (especially A, B12, Zn and Se). **Selenium** as the only among other vitamins/ minerals has shown a statistically significant effect in prolonging life- span of HIV- positive individuals (for approx. 2 years). The dose: 100 mcg/ daily. MD, prof. R.H.Keller from the U.S.A. has stressed that using triple combinations without a supplement of antioxidants (Se, vit. C, E or else) is just not logical. The reason is the great burden on liver from all the drugs.

AIDS/NGO movement in St Petersburg sets a good example. From 1998 its Salvation Army has founded a PWA club *Nadezhda (Hope)*. Informative events and discussions are being held there in an informal and confidential way. Mental and social support (e.g., financial help to certain families; vitamins to children) is also provided. Many a PWA could not imagine their life without this programme any more (ThPp1459).

Under the auspices of EC Tacis/ Lien programme a club for homeopathy adepts *Mria* has been opened in Ukraine. It has held seminars spreading messages on complementary HIV prevention and treatment practices (TuPeE3927).

During the evenings I plunged into the conference **cultural programme**, rich in afro jazz rhythms. The most legendary S. African story- teller, leader and healer, also a poet and sculptor (two of his art books were available in shops) dr Kredo Mutva held his presentation onstage the Durban theatre. Like the rest of audience, I got myself enchanted by his simple and beautiful language. He told us how the colonizers eradicated local health- oriented and nature- based traditions (“Just a fool may throw away his cultural heritage”), how ancient African traditions (e.g., talking to plants etc.) are now being commercialised in the West. Dr Mutva pitied the fact that S. African government does not promote or praise its native healers in contrary to China, India and the U.S.A., where Indian shamans or vedical healers are highly esteemed. I remembered my country with its prohibition to old ladies selling herbal remedies (the last branch of our “wizards”) to even show up at the market- place. The reason – there has been a case of intoxication! (Accordingly, every pharmacy should be closed as well because of innumerable intoxications!)

During the week in Durban I got surprised three times – seeing the department stores’ chain branded “Edgars” (Latvian male name); hearing from an office manager of his Latvian origins; and being welcomed by a hearty hug from a hotel proprietress – I was her first tenant from Latvia – the place her Grandfather had to leave because of his revolutionary activities.

Back to Durban! Several **conference excursions** were organised to attend local communities. I went to Kwa Zulu Natal region. Though village shacks are really made from pieces of tin and plywood, children looked healthy, joyful and did not beg from us (like in the city). Still, the main means of transportation are two legs. We were too late (no haste in Africa!), and the local chieftain had already gone away. We attended the village health centre. Locals had been waiting for us and we were served boiled meat with batatas. Country- women were producing strange guttural animal- like sounds during the meal (their meaning remained unclear to me). The utterly tasty white, “thick” ale was

traditionally served, crouching on knees and ladies in national costumes were singing and dancing, but not a single smile showed up - their faces were ice cold. Was it because of the centuries- old hatred or self- esteem or wounded feelings or contempt or just because of indifference? Nearby was a shaman's hut – a half sphere made of hay – the only nice African style building in the village. We had to take off our shoes when entering. A small garden with herbs and plants was nearby. Shaman is also educated on AIDS and she uses her knowledge while talking to locals. When the evening starts setting the shaman (local organiser of the event) tells us she would not mind some gifts. I am surprised at the extreme thrift of Westerners (the excursion was very cheap) – just one of them puts his hand into his pocket to provide from it ... an AIDS badge! I have taken beads with me and she says that amber is nice. Will she remember the name “Latvia”?!

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