

TREATMENT INFORMATION GROUP

thinking about AIDS drugs

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Miss Tamar Khan

Business Day

PO Box 1745

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Dear Miss Kahn

'AIDS RESISTANCE'

I refer to your tremendously interesting article under the above headline in *Business Day* on the 16th. It really is wonderful to think that thanks to the discoveries of committed researchers fighting AIDS in the French medical industrial corporation Ivagen we now have a special test for special antibodies that tells people whether they're one of the special 'small minority of patients who take up to 20 years to develop AIDS', who 'can safely delay in taking antiretroviral medicines'. Otherwise, as you point out, they're in for it: 'Without treatment most people infected with HIV will develop AIDS-associated illnesses within three to five years.'

The **Treatment Information Group** is a public interest initiative to promote *research-based* debate of antiretroviral drug policy, alternative non-toxic treatment approaches to AIDS, and HIV testing issues in South Africa. The TIG has entered into a strategic alliance with the

Dr. Rath Health Foundation Africa to achieve this.

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www.dr-rath-foundation.org.za

Propaganda is to democracies what violence is to dictatorships.
Noam Chomsky

I'd love to tell everyone your exciting news, but I just want to be sure of my facts before I do in case they ask me any questions.

Can you refer me to any peer-reviewed research article published in the medical literature in which it's been found and reported in an epidemiological study that 'most people infected with HIV' will keel over with AIDS in 'three to five years' – unless he or she takes life-saving ARV drugs marketed by pharmaceutical companies every day until he or she dies?

Since, according to the HSRC's 'HIV Prevalence' report released in December 2005, 37.9% of young African women between 25 and 29 have the AIDS virus in their vaginas (but thankfully only 0.6% of whites generally), does this mean that nearly half our country's young African women will 'develop AIDS-associated illnesses within three to five years' and soon be dead – unless they start taking AZT and similar drugs right away?

And likewise, since the HSRC researchers reported that 40.7% of women in KwaZulu-Natal have got the virus in them (and they mean the maids not the madams), does this mean that the place will soon be half empty of native females?

As your newspaper's resident AIDS expert, who's been covering AIDS as 'Science and Health Editor' for ages and who's in regular close contact with the finest scientific and medical minds in the AIDS field, could you share your special knowledge with me on these perplexing and most worrisome conundrums?

Can you refer me to any peer-reviewed research article published in the medical literature in which it's been found and reported in an epidemiological study that an exceptional 'small minority' of HIV-

positive people 'take up to 20 years to develop AIDS'? And could you possibly put a figure on this 'small minority' for me?

Particularly since, according to the HSRC, there seem to be an *overwhelming majority* of African people in our country who are HIV antibody-positive, unaware of it, hale and hearty, and, to the disappointment of invariably non-African commentators like you, not sick and showing no signs of getting sick.

In fact, can you refer me to any peer-reviewed research article published in the medical literature in which it's been found and reported in an epidemiological study that HIV-positive people always develop AIDS, sooner or later.

If you can't refer me to any such research articles substantiating your alarming claims, would it be reasonable to infer that either you got them from a TAC pamphlet, or you just made them up in the Judith Miller tradition of camp-follower journalism, hoping to win our next award for this* in 2006?

And if either of the latter, would it be fair to rate you, along with the DA's Dianne Kohler-Barnard, as being what your editor Peter Bruce styles an 'unreliable source'?

Were you perhaps paid by Davies Diagnostics to puff its hopeful new 'anti-R7V test' in *Business Day* for the commercial classes ahead of its 'launch ... in SA' which 'Davies Diagnostics is planning'?

Or were you just so stimulated when MD Tony Chaplin shared his business plans with you over lunch (his Rolex, BMW keys and gold-card flashing) that you sort of flat-lined and left your critical faculties at the bottom of the glass?

Or could it be that, remembering how nice it felt as a Brownie doing a Good Turn during your childhood in England, you were so eager to Lend a Hand in the War against AIDS that you were willing to get down and do it with no more than a faxed product-release statement prepared by one of those big medical services PR companies for AIDS industry groupies always available in the newspapers? Thinking you'd turn it into a piece of investigative reporting by tacking on some truly cretinous comments by those tragically dim-witted persons Alan Smith and Francois Venter.

Since what 'Scientists believe' makes you weak at the knees.

As I've said before, you have a most charming accent, and I'd like to add that you're very pretty too, but I really must ask you if you have any brains.

With fond regards

ADV ANTHONY BRINK

Encl: Copy of article 'AIDS resistance', by Tamar Kahn in *Business Day* on 16 February 2006

*The Judith Miller Award for AIDS Journalism in South Africa, 2005.

CC: Government, ANC, Business Day Editor Peter Bruce, other media, other interested parties, and online at www.tig.org.za