



Riverside County Public Health

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HIV conference planned for Dec. 1 in Palm Springs

Despite advances in HIV treatment and better understanding of the disease, some say discrimination and bias remain unrelenting problems for those who suffer with the illness.

“If the treatment for HIV is so effective these days, why is the stigma so bad?” asked Sean Strub, who will deliver the keynote address during an annual HIV conference Dec. 1 in Palm Springs. “Many long-term survivors, like myself, think that HIV-related stigma today is worse than it has ever been.”

Strub has lived with the illness for three decades and is executive director of the Pennsylvania-based Sero Project. According to the organization’s website, Sero is a network of people with HIV and allies fighting for freedom from stigma and injustice.

The Pathways to Health and Well-Being conference has taken place for about 10 years and is a collaboration among the Riverside County Public Health Department, Desert AIDS Project, Riverside County Mental Health Department and several community partners. It is free, but anyone who wants to attend is asked to register at www.pathwayshivconference.org

The conference, which takes place on World AIDS Day, begins at 8:30 a.m. and runs until 4:30 p.m. at the Palm Springs Convention Center.

Conference-goers can attend a variety of break-out sessions, including those dealing with HIV and substance abuse; “Navigating Obamacare;” pain management; dealing with depression and anxiety; and ways to reduce stress. There also will be free confidential HIV and Hep C testing – with results available in 20 minutes.

“The conference can benefit everyone from those who have been coping with their diagnosis for many years to those who recently became aware of their status,” said Public Health Director Susan Harrington, who will open the conference.

Strub, the keynote speaker, is a writer and long-time activist who founded POZ Magazine, co-chaired the North American regional affiliate of the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+/NA) and co-founded and is a member of the Positive Justice Project. Strub said his keynote address, titled “Turning Stigma into Strength,” will attempt to provide some historical context to the issue of stigma and what can be done today to combat it.

“...These events are most important for the sharing of information and building of networks, both of which are critical to the fight against HIV,” he said.