Richard devotes energy to HIV education

Richard hopes through making his story public to both dispel stereotypes about AIDS patients (there is no typical AIDS patient), and to inform others of what HIV and AIDS really are.

Richard is a gay man who left Acadiana shortly after graduating from Carencro High School. He moved to Houston, where he worked both as a stripper in a night club and in retail management.

This was at a time when AIDS was generally unknown to the mainstream public, and was still often referred to as GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome). His success in the corporate world eventually led him to Boston, where, in 1983, he tested positive for HIV.

Another way that Richard is fighting the disease is by educating the public and offering support and counseling to others who have the virus.

He tells his story wherever he can, most recently giving a lecture at UL to a group of college students.

"After the lecture, several students approached me and wanted to give me a hug," he said. "They were really moved by what I had to say."

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According to Richard, there are stages in the progression leading up to being classified as having AIDS by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control, the federal agency that identifies and monitors diseases). The CDC uses the T-cell count as a guideline for determining the stages of infection, he said.

Richard explained that T-cells are the disease-fighting cells in human blood that identify alien viruses, and help the immune system kill these alien viruses.

He said that HIV, which stands for Human Immuno-deficiency Virus, kills the T-cells from the inside out, which disables the body from fighting off disease.

"A completely healthy person has 1000 to 1500 T-cells per blood unit," he said.

"Once a person contracts HIV, that number often drops between 500 and 1000."

Richard explained that AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is diagnosed when the T-cell count is at 200 or below.

This is when the patient begins to experience what are referred to as opportunistic diseases.

In other words, no one dies of AIDS itself, they die of ailments such as pneumonia, to which their bodies are extremely susceptible and unable to fight because of the weakened immune system.

Amazingly, Ted Richard's T-cell count is currently at 32, and he has yet to suffer an opportunistic disease.

Ted Richard's life has been profoundly affected by AIDS.

"I gave up a lot because of the disease," he explained. "Many of the friends that I had in Houston and Boston are now dead."

"My older brother and his wife just had a baby this past summer," he said, "and I don't get to spend a lot of time with my new niece."

Richard explained that the reason for this is that the child is undergoing her childhood vaccinations and Ted is extremely susceptible to contracting the viruses against which his niece is being inoculated.

Ted knows that he can do little to change the isolation from loved ones that serves as a precaution for his own safety.

He does, however, feel compelled to do something about the isolation that many AIDS patients feel as a result of misperceptions and prejudice.

"Many of these patients have been disowned by their families and have no one to turn to," he said.

As a result, Ted performs pre- and post HIV test counseling every Monday and Wednesday night at UMC.

Shakespeare wrote: "Be still prepared for death, and tell that life shall be the sweeter."

Ted Richard has made his peace with death, and as a result is living his life to the fullest, and making it count in our community.