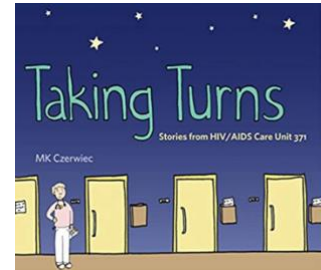


Discussion Guide

Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371

By MK Czerwiec

1. Early in the novel, MK Czerwiec describes a summer job in which she interviewed family members of patients who had died in the hospital. On page 11, she notes that the study showed, “that being nice matters.” From your experiences with healthcare providers, does being nice matter? If so, in what ways?
2. Art figures prominently in *Taking Turns*. Obviously, MK Czerwiec uses an art form, comics, to tell her story. Other examples of art imbue her narrative, from the depiction of a Keith Haring mural (page 4) to a mention of an art therapy program (page 48) to the description of Tim’s art show opening (page 77). How useful is art in conveying scientific or medical information? In what ways can art, either making it or viewing it, be therapeutic?
3. Beginning on page 80, Czerwiec describes her own potential exposure to HIV via an accidental needle stick. Had you previously considered this risk to healthcare providers? Do healthcare providers have a right to know if a person is HIV+? What about teachers? Co-workers?
4. Following her needle stick, the author began taking the anti-retroviral drug AZT to minimize her chance of becoming infected. On page 88 she writes, “Getting my prescription filled was weird, too.” What do you think she meant by this remark?
5. Throughout the book, Czerwiec includes detailed scientific information. For example, an in-depth description of the immune system is provided on page 9 and a detailed overview of an HIV treatment regimen is provided on page 36. How do these details affect your understanding of the story?
6. Throughout the history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, people living with HIV have been stigmatized. What examples of stigma does MK Czerwiec provide? In what ways do she and other members of the Unit 371 staff combat stigma?
7. Begun in 1987 and described by Czerwiec on page 155, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is intended to memorialize people who have died of HIV/AIDS. Why is it important to remember these people? What is symbolic about commemorating them with a quilt, and displaying this quilt in public dramatically. Rather than dying of AIDS, people were living with HIV. How did this change affect MK? Other staff members of Unit 371?
8. Near the end of *Taking Turns*, the author recounts a 2008 visit with Roger, a former patient of Unit 371. Many people with HIV/AIDS who survived the darkest days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, like Roger, describe a sense of survivor’s guilt. They lived, while others died. How do you think surviving a disease can lead to feelings of guilt?
9. Although effective HIV/AIDS treatments now exist, these treatments are more readily available in resource-rich settings. Should anti-retroviral drugs, or access to healthcare in general, be more evenly distributed? What needs to happen to improve access?



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