

Appendix 2.1

Tatyana Fedyaeva

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Tatyana Fedyaeva:

Good afternoon, dear listeners.

You are listening to the Russian Provinces program on Narodnoye Radio, and I, Tatyana Fedyaeva, am your host. Our sound engineer Viktor Pankratov and I are broadcasting today from Saratov.

About this beautiful city we could talk for a long time. We could tell you how gorgeous Volga river looks as it flows through Saratov, and how majestically the unique bridge looks that joins its two banks. How you can feel the vastness of Russia when looking over Volga. We could talk a long time about this city's main landmark. This is a spectacular Gothic building of local Conservatoire. We could tell about Saratov's Arbat where so many people are walking during daytime and in the evenings. Most of them are young, suntanned, handsome.

We could tell you about markets where they are selling fish caught right here in Volga. And local tomatoes! They say that Engels tomatoes – that is tomatoes grown around nearby Engels town – are the juiciest and the tastiest. We can testify to it.

We could tell you also about an amazing town called Khvalynsk. Strange town, as if it is lost in time and space, surrounded by pine forests growing on shining white chalk hills. About 145 million years ago sea waves were rolling there. Chalk sediments with occasional embedded sea shells are a reminder of ages past. There are many-many things that we could tell you about.

Music

Main part of our program will be about youth. Why? Because it was in Saratov region that the project "Young Journalists about AIDS" was launched first.

What is AIDS? It is an acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

What is HIV? It is a human immunodeficiency virus. This problem was widely discussed at one time. Some claimed that this is "the plague of the 20th century", and those infected with it are outcasts who deserve neither pity nor understanding. Others, on the contrary, argued that these are horror tales spread by pharmacists and there is nothing to fear. Two opposite points of view.

What does the statistics say?

The UN and the WHO estimate that approximately 50 million people in the world today are infected with HIV. According to the AIDS Research and Methodology Center, over 300 thousand HIV infections are registered now in Russia. This number approximately equals the population of an average regional capital. 4 thousand 453 HIV-infected people died in Russia before 2004, including 741 persons diagnosed with AIDS.

Presently almost two thousand children are diagnosed with HIV. Saratov region holds 14th place in Russia in terms of registered HIV cases. Quite recently it occupied 10th place. Now it holds 4th place in this respect in the Volga federal district. 6 thousand 476 HIV cases were identified since April 1996. Over one and half thousand were identified in penal institutions of the Interior Ministry. HIV infection is registered on 38 administrative territories of the region. The largest numbers of HIV cases are registered in Balakovo, Saratov, Volsk, Engels, and – we must face the truth – this infection by now has penetrated rural areas too. Among registered HIV cases, 76 percent constitute young people between 18 and 29 years of age. This is 5 thousand people. Just 5 thousand, you could say. Not too many if you compare this number to the population of a large city. But imagine that these people are our children, our friends, our grandchildren, they are our future. So this problem affects all of us. We must learn to live with it somehow.

Music

Olya What can I say? I used to think that this problem cannot possibly affect me ever. And I will never have to face it like this, directly. When we began participating in this program, "Journalists and AIDS Prevention," I happened to meet a person who was HIV-positive. And who helps people like himself to cope and not to get lost in life. What I really understood is that these people are not different from us in any way, different from those who are not HIV-positive. And another thing that became clear to me after meeting this person was that they know how to value life. They understand that perhaps they do not have much time left to live. And that they cannot any more to live this life in full. And this is why they value its every moment so much...

When they understand that this cannot be avoided, and they will have to live with it, many of them totally rethink their lives. When they are already on this road; I do not mean the very moment when a person, say, just got clean or just learned about being HIV-infected, at that moment one cannot assess the situation adequately. But the person I met, he lives with this diagnosis for 8 years. And he learned to be happy.

This is what he told me: "I learned to be happy. I learned to value people. I learned to value life." He managed to get off drugs. He was very friendly with me. He said right away that he is not making secret of his diagnosis, that he is HIV-positive.

He made such a strong impression on me; I liked him so much... I saw that he is really trying to become a better person. No ordinary man would value every moment so much. He was telling me about moments that people normally do not notice. During that visit I also happened to meet a group of people from different cities, they were HIV-positive too. They get together, they see each other. And they told me that they just came back from Kaliningrad.

A girl contacted them via Internet, she had a six-year old child, and she was HIV-positive too, she was dying, she had AIDS at the terminal stage. She says: "I don't know how to tell my kid about this." So this group, all of them, just got up and went there to see her. This is what amazes me, their bold actions, how they fight for each other, how they stick together, how they feel about each other. I realized that these people really deserve respect. If they have already learned to cope with this problem, if they want so much to be part of the society, if they want understanding and adequate treatment from the society, then they deserve our respect. They deserve help in getting it back.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Olya, don't you think that by this token we justify thoughtless and permissive behavior, drug abuse, and by this token also cruelty towards their families that suffers from all this? Yes, today you look for strong sensations and ignore tomorrow's consequences. But if a trial in the form of HIV comes, then you stop, think, and become a better person. Meanwhile... live fast and easy! I mean those who are not carrying HIV yet.

Olya: Well, this is inevitable – I mean mistakes that young people make and negative experience. And if a person knows all about it, then, as they say, forewarned means forearmed. First, we need informational support on this subject. We must understand that this infection is not airborne. If we will simply reject those who, as we believe, behave wrongly, this will only make things worse for them and for us. We must try and understand other people.

If we treat an HIV-positive person negatively, assuming and viewing him only as a drug addict, then naturally, he will withdraw. He will not tell anyone about it. He will infect several more people. I think this theory looks the most probable. And if we accept them as all others – because there are many people suffering from incurable diseases – there will be less room for evil left. Why should we see them as some kind of outcasts? Why should we treat them in this manner? They are people like us. And I already understand that spiritually, morally they are sometimes better than ordinary people who were never put to trial.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: This statement could be disputed. Who can measure and compare spiritual richness of a person? But it is a fact that HIV makes people rethink their lives. But is not this too high a price to pay?

Olya: The man I met, he told me that before he learned of his diagnosis, he never suspected that it exists so close to him. And when I asked what he could tell us, the younger generation, college students, he said he wants us to think about our future children, our beloved, and our health first of all. Because, as he said, AIDS makes everybody equal. It's not that you can contract AIDS only if you are a prostitute or a junkie. If you are an educated and successful young person, that does not

mean that you are fully safe. Out of sheer ignorance you might neglect to use that very condom that can easily protect from infection. It is quite easy to protect yourself from HIV. But only if we know more, if the society is better informed.

But many people believe that it exists somewhere far away from them, and this is a problem, I believe. They think that – here I am, good, prosperous, promising, and it will never affect me. But you need to remember about it always. Because even in Saratov there are over 500 officially registered HIV cases and only 11 of them receive treatment. Because treatment is so expensive. This is what is really frightening.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Olya, and don't you think that – as we can hear now, recently, this frequently expressed opinion that young people do not need fidelity, do not need love. That you may have many sexual contacts, you can inject with many different syringes, etc., etc. Everything is permissible, everything is worth trying. That is, you get an impression that such concepts as morals, virtue, traditions of any kind, principles, - all of them are outdated. Do you have the same impression?

Olya: Well, it is possible that each following generation has fewer moral principles than the previous one. You can see it. And you can trace this chain. And perhaps this is how our life is structured, sort of, that each following generation will be less inhibited than the previous one.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: But in the West nowadays, for example, in the US, they are cultivating such values as fidelity or virginity. What do you think about that? No sex before marriage. This is happening, as I said, in the United States, not somewhere else.

Olya: I believe that this should be a personal choice, of course. I think it is wrong to judge people who accept sex before marriage. But I think also that it is wrong to judge those who want to stay faithful until marriage. This is the choice each person makes. I even think that marriage or not, it does not matter really. You just need to be honest with yourself. And act consciously. If you want to, if you think over carefully the way you want to take, then take it without fear.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Lydia Zlatogorskaya, chair of the regional Union of Journalists, when she initiated this project, made a decision that young people, young journalists who will be invited to discuss this problem, must write about it. They must write about it accurately, competently, without hiding their heads in the sand, without saying that the problem will go away somehow by itself, will just fade out. We have too many ulcers already. It is impossible to ignore them. Not only journalists participating in the project had to learn new things and improve professional skills, but also project organizers. After studying all publications about HIV, they realized that the problem has many aspects. That all these aspects are closely interwoven. Then they tried to prioritize. Eventually the most important aspects became subjects for seminars and trainings. Here they are: "What is HIV? Myths, truth, and background;" "Psychology of HIV-infected people;" etc. And when all kids participating in the project started discussing it with their friends, they discovered how little do people actually know about the problem.

Music

Recording:

– Speaking of HIV/AIDS, maybe a year or two ago I did not see it as a particular problem. Because back then I believed that AIDS or HIV depends on behavior problems. Because main ways of transmission were drugs or promiscuity. So I believed that mainly it depends on people's behavior or morals. Now, six months ago, I learned that this problem is really relevant if even such an organization as the Union of Journalists decides to address it directly. Here I received new knowledge. For example, at the last seminar I learned that half of HIV-infected women were absolutely decent people with totally straight lifestyles. So basically anyone can contract HIV. Another thing – previously there was this notion of high-risk groups. But if you cannot identify

specifically what people compose this high-risk group, this means that practically everybody is in danger. That is, I really think that this problem is very relevant today.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: And what about you personally? There is another prevalent opinion now that if you are protected by certain moral principles, then you are completely safe from danger. That is, if you do not have sex with strangers, do not use drugs, then you are fine, everything is all right. Do you think this is true?

– Not entirely true, I think. There are different cases. For example, an accident, a car crash. If someone suffers a loss of blood, a driver or somebody else, and if the virus penetrates bloodstream, then it is quite possible too to get infected. Of course, virus in general presents a problem. And still you cannot preclude that people with normal moral standards, students, maybe certain part of educated population are in danger too. This is quite possible.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: You are to become a journalist. Since you chose this profession, I am sure you are already publishing. Would you see coverage of this topic as one of your priorities?

– Yes, I got interested in this subject. Especially because until recently the press reviews I read, until projects of this kind began at the Union of Journalists, the quality of publications on this subject was mediocre to put it mildly. Because they were reflecting mainly bare statistics. And only once a year, when the AIDS Day was observed, and a reporter got assignment to write something on this theme. But you can see right away that a reporter does not care about the subject, there is no emotion felt. And the main thing that I noticed was that the majority of these reports would not address a human story. Maybe a small percentage. They absolutely would not touch upon human lives.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: So, for some time it was possible to say that the issue concerns morals. Someone is behaving badly. And is punished by this disease. But what can we say now about hundreds – and across the entire Russia, about thousands of infected children? What are they guilty of? What is the guilt of children born to infected mothers? Maybe their mothers knew nothing of the disease or ways of its transmission? Maybe they were just living their lives the way commercials teach us nowadays. Maybe they were just living according to the principles that are today promoted very clearly and intentionally: take all you can from this life. So they are taking – our boys and girls – and give a lot in return.

Alexander: I am Alexander. I am from Balashov where I live a quiet life. And I do this thing called the Youth Page in the *Balashovskaya Pravda* newspaper published in this town. It is two years old already. In fact, it covers a variety of subjects that young people are interested in, that they really like, and look forward to our pages in subsequent issues. Perhaps because this page is written by young people just like them, high school and college students, who belong to this milieu, know it from within, and understand very well problems faced by modern youth in our country. Why have we started doing this?

Only because we want our youth to live differently from what commercials impose on them; to live at the level of Russia. We do not publish any propaganda-like opinions on our page. We publish what comes from the heart. As you work, you meet a lot of people. And only recently you started thinking that perhaps some of them are HIV-infected. Because statistics gives us its large and fearsome numbers even for such small Russian towns as, say, Balashov. In the past I absolutely never paid attention, who is this person, why. And basically, why would it be my business. But I happened to join a very interesting project with journalists who cover this problem, who write about this. And now I notice that people don't know all this and feel about them the same way I used to before.

In fact, this is really frightening, when you read newspapers or see unprepared journalists who jump to this subject and think, no big deal, I can write that milk production is such and such, so I can write about AIDS too, that statistics is such and such. And they get dry numbers which could have

been OK in other case. But not here, with live people, with very serious problems, health problems, who are oppressed by the society that literally does not care. There are people who are afraid of infected patients. And they are having very hard time, people who are HIV-positive.

So the goal of this program is to teach young journalists to communicate with such people, to teach them how to write stories related to this subject. This is really wonderful. Who knows? Our country always was different in some respect. Now we are different in being number one in terms of infection spread.

Indeed, sometimes you feel afraid even to go out. But on the other hand, why? Afraid not for myself, that I can get infected somehow by someone by chance, of course not, everything has been explained to me actually. Afraid because so many people, especially young, beautiful girls, handsome kids are walking with it, living with it. Not each of them even knows it. And those who know perhaps do not realize in full that it is possible to live with it too.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Indeed, it is possible to live with it. In the same way as it is possible to live in a stuffy closed space and think that air is the same everywhere. In the same way as it is possible to live with tuberculosis or other horrible diseases. But why? Why live like this if life can be different? What can be done to make the virus stop its horrible race across Russia? Do you know that Russia and Ukraine now are number one in terms of HIV infection spread rate? Every day we increase the army of infected people. Consciously, unconsciously, or foolishly.

You can say that these people are bad, not nice. But this is meaningless. They are OUR people. We don't have any other. What should we do? We should understand, talk, and teach. Ilya Yefimovich Steinberg, Doctor of Philosophy, Director of Saratov regional nongovernmental organization "Socium", and senior research fellow of the Russian Academy of Sciences, speaks.

Ilya Steinberg: Your question is what young people think about HIV/AIDS? What can I say to this question? The HIV/AIDS issues affect the younger population of our country more and more today. So the youth's attitude depends on the extent to which this problem touches them. Recently we can observe certain changes in young people's attitude towards the problem as such. They become more responsible. That is, we encounter fewer statements to the effect that it's no business of mine, it does not concern me, it will never happen to me. There are fewer and fewer answers of this kind to a direct question of whether you are concerned with the problem of HIV infection spread.

And I think that media play a significant role in this, because media – although sometimes controversially – but do inform the population in principle about developments in this area. On the other hand, the HIV threat, as the drug addiction threat before that, begins gradually to penetrate young people's minds. If we remember how drug addiction was spreading among the youth, somewhere back in the 1997-1998 when we did a study, we suddenly discovered that one person in four closely knows someone who uses drugs.

So now, although we do not say that HIV infection is as widespread as drugs, nevertheless I believe that young people already realize that no one is insured against it, that it can affect anyone. And their attitude to using condoms testifies to this.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Ilya Yefimovich, you said that a certain dynamics is observed in young people's attitude towards HIV/AIDS. Can we say that in Saratov region this dynamics is positive?

Ilya Steinberg: Are we talking about HIV spread dynamics or about young people's attitude towards HIV infection? Of course, the HIV spread dynamics... We cannot say that we can observe a stable decrease. It is far too early for being optimistic in this area. Presently over five thousand cases of HIV are identified in Saratov region. In such cities as Saratov, Engels, or Balakovo the number of people suffering from it, carrying the immunodeficiency virus is rather large. We can say that identification of cases increases. That is, at one time the situation was such that, for example, the statistics of HIV infections in Engels city with about 300 thousand population and in Saratov city were approximately the same. That is, I can say that attitude towards this disease and towards

everything related to HIV/AIDS has changed definitely. But can I say that statistics has become better or worse? Unfortunately, nowhere in Russia it is becoming better. Sorry.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: Ilya Yefimovich, I know that you have just finished a large training event, very serious training for the School of Journalism students. What are your expectations now? Your assessment?

Ilya Steinberg: You can say that it was training for young journalists, even though they are still students. Nevertheless, they are people who have chosen journalism as their profession. And I liked the fact that they are concerned about this problem. Many were saying that they would like to approach it and to write about it more thoughtfully. But nevertheless, when we were conducting this training, we began with distributing a kind of questionnaire: what do you know about HIV/AIDS? Because apparently these young people read a lot about this subject, discussed it, were interested in it. And when you ask them first – what do you know? – it seems that they know it all, things like transmission etc. But when they began to fill this questionnaire, after they finished it, it became obvious that very many aspects remain sort of not quite clear to them or quite unknown. And this is the source where so many myths are generated – this incomplete knowledge. And this is one of our problems, this mythology – does it reflect our mindset or is it a result of distorted information? Of course, it is hard for me to say, whether this information is distorted consciously or unconsciously. But all the rumors, for example, about HIV transmission methods, or all the myths about possibility to cure HIV infection, their source is definitely just incomplete knowledge. I can say that the training participants did learn a lot. And another thing I would like to comment on, the one that you mentioned. It is related to journalists' position when they cover this problem. I don't want to use lofty words like citizens' position or say moral stance. But their interest in discussing this problem and the very structure of discussions were showing how relevant is this issue. That is, despite all the talks about our young generation being material, only interested in money, willing to do anything for money, this is not true. This is grossly exaggerated. Many students in our classes demonstrated that they care what they are writing for and who they are writing for. It is important.

Tatyana Fedyaeva: In the last year many stories were published in Saratov region about AIDS. At the same time physicians working at the Anti-AIDS Center, the same one that deals with this problem, noticed that more young people started coming to them not only for examination but also for information that can help them behave correctly in the society. And journalists themselves who launched this project say that they realized that people's interest in the HIV/AIDS issues and their desire to learn more about people who go through life guarding this secret within them is just one way of psychological defense, one way of fighting inner fear. What if I am like that too? Where is the line between living and not living? Can you live in a limbo? And together with discussions about seemingly frightening things – infection, diseases that might come or maybe not come, after all, young people come back to discussing the eternal subjects: good and evil, darkness and light. The time has come to think. And learn. Learn how to remain human under any circumstances. And to know that in bad times you will get help in fighting for yourself. In any case, this is the task that young Saratov journalists had set up for themselves. This concludes the Russia Provinces program. I am Tatyana Fedyaeva. Today we were talking about Saratov and how one of the most acute and relevant problems – the AIDS/HIV problem – is tackled there. Good day to you, and all the best.