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I began working in HIV when...

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In 1988 I was living in NYC, doing my postgraduate courses as a Clinical Psychologist in Systemic Family Therapy. I was videotaping clinical sessions to help pay for my studies. I taped groups of psychologists discussing their cases. I was told that there were some cases of clients living with HIV and no one wanted to videotape those; I volunteered to do it, and that's when I got trapped. This was during the eighties and I remember the first session I videotaped. It was this man in his forties explaining that he thought he might be HIV positive. The therapist asked him "why do you think you might be HIV positive?" and he explained that he was married with four children, he went to church every Sunday, but during his business trips, he would have sex. The therapist then asked, with a commercial sex worker? The man responded, "I have sex with men, but only when I travel for business." I got trapped. I started thinking that this was the tip of the iceberg, and that this new AIDS disease was a bio-psycho-social phenomenon, and I wanted to get involved. I wanted to understand human behaviors, people's double lives, and I started taking all the courses I could related to working with partners and families of those living with HIV. When I went back to Argentina after I got my degree, I got very involved not only with clinical work in my private practice, but also at the University of Buenos Aires. I created seminars and post-graduate courses; I also trained health providers in interdisciplinary approaches to work with PLWHA. I worked for a county AIDS program, developing community outreach work as well as curricula for schools (kindergarten, elementary, and high school) so that parents, teachers, administrative staff and children could learn about prevention, etc. I created the first support groups for PLWHA at the University hospital. I was lucky by then to understand both sides – from the patient as well as the provider perspective. I understood the PLWHA, I heard their feedback. I also recognized the fears of health providers, and this enabled me to create programs that considered all the different perspectives. PAHO [Pan American Health Organization] funded the project at the University of Buenos Aires and wanted UNAIDS to get to know this program that was taking place at the University as a best practice. From there I began consulting for different agencies (USAID, WHO, UNICEF, GTZ, AUSAID, etc) all around the world until I finally came to JSI/Denver in 2005. So, for my entire professional life, I have been involved in this field—that's 25 years!