Dear friends,

Happy New Year to you all! I hope this request finds you in good health and that 2012 brings much joy your way.

Every January, I begin my quest at raising money for the NorCal AIDS Cycle – a 330 mile bike ride over three and a half days in May that raises money and awareness for HIV/AIDS. Over the last seven years, we have raised over one million dollars. Much more is needed.

As of this year, I took on the role of president of the board of directors of the NorCal AIDS Cycle. With this role comes the responsibility to raise needed funds and awareness – a conversation about HIV/AIDS must be ongoing. So, here I am asking for your money and your commitment to talk about HIV/AIDS.

I wish I wasn't in this position 30 years after the discovery of HIV/AIDS. I have hoped there would be a cure, a vaccine and no new infections. Although we have made tremendous advances, none of this has happened.

You may be wondering what HIV and viral loads are. HIV is a virus that enters the body via blood. HIV is found in blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. Once transferred from one source to another, HIV looks for cells that are part of the immune system – cells that protect us from harmful things in the environment that are generally not bothersome if you have an intact immune system. But once the immune system becomes weakened as a result of HIV, diseases our bodies normally fight take hold, AIDS develops and people die. The viral load is the amount of HIV that is present in the blood at any given moment.

Today, we have a way to measure the amount of HIV present in blood down to 28 particles per milliliter of blood. This correlates with less virus to spread. In order to do this, to lower the community viral load, EVERY person must be tested and EVERY person must be treated. Great studies have shown that if every person who is infected with HIV could get their viral load to an undetectable level, we may decrease the spread of HIV to a minimum. This would be remarkable.

The problem? There are still people who think they are not eligible for the virus. But, let me tell you, this virus does not care if you are gay or straight, wealthy or poor, Catholic or Muslim, male or female, young or old. All it needs is for you to be human.

As an example of who is affected by HIV/AIDS, I am including stories of some of the patients that I care for. I am sharing these stories to show that it could be any one of us. At some point in our lives, we have all been at risk for HIV. It's not just over there. It's not just them. It's us – all of us. Their stories are the same as ours.

Each day, I go to work as a Nurse Practitioner, caring for those infected with HIV. I play a role in prevention in terms of helping my clients not infect others.

And here’s where you come in – playing a part in this fight.

First, I ask you to give money, whatever you can, to help prevent infections and care for those already infected. Please, reach deep. There is no budget in the State of California for prevention services and the state funds for medication are diminishing. We need a lot of money. A test is $15. A month of medication costs about $1,200.

Food, housing, clothing and basic essentials are needed, too. Many folks with HIV are living on the edge, without hope, stigmatized and depressed.

This year, the funds that CARES (the clinic where I work) receives from the NorCal AIDS Cycle will go toward our dental program. HIV causes terrible dental issues.

Another request is that you have conversations with your family and friends and remind them about HIV. Please, get tested yourself and ask others to get tested, understanding that HIV does not discriminate. This is not a disease of others. It is a disease that infects and affects all of us.

I have been working with HIV/AIDS patients for 25 years. I have seen the devastation. I have seen the deterioration of people with AIDS. We must not go backward. We must look forward, treating those who have HIV/AIDS and doing everything possible to stop new infections.

I thank you for your support over the years. I know that times are difficult financially for all of us. But I promise whatever you give will make a difference in someone's life. I will not stop until this is over and I ask that you do the same.

All my best,