Doctor Feel Good

Mark Tuggle lands the tough but tender physician of his dreams

August 1, 2005 By Mark Tuggle

The first time I went to my current doctor's office, I was as anxious and excited as a teenager waiting for a blind date to ring the doorbell. She was a highly recommended AIDS specialist, and, despite eight doctors in as many years, I was still optimistic about finding "the One." After a short wait, the nurse led me to an office and left, closing the door behind her. When the door opened, I smiled and said,"Are you going to take care of me?" My new doctor touched my shoulder and gently replied, "Only if you let me, dear."

And then I exhaled.

Finding the right physician is as daunting a task as finding the right lover. Every person with HIV brings their unique personality to the examining room—and so does each doctor. I'm a warm, gentle, passionate, 44-year-old same-gender-loving man of African descent. I can also be arrogant and unyielding—I was born with an attitude. MDs can be difficult, too: Many forget just who is living with HIV and react with horror if you miss taking a pill. That's a shame because HIV docs are more than medical professionals. They are our nutritionists, safer-sex gurus, therapists and, if we're lucky, friends.

I was diagnosed in the winter of '94. Though I was asymptomatic, I became terrified and obsessed with death—like Tupac and Biggie, but for a different reason. My first physician was, like me, a strong believer in holistic health. Yet he never asked me how I felt about AIDS. So I was afraid to be honest with him about the difficulties of my life: I was newly in recovery, frightened of HIV meds and uncomfortable talking about my sexual behavior.

When I checked in one afternoon, the receptionist casually informed me that the facility no longer employed him. Damn—no letter, no phone call, nothing. I felt like a dumped boyfriend. The staff dutifully referred me to a same-gender-loving black female doc, which gave me hope that we might connect. But when I shared my fears around taking meds, she barked, in front of three other physicians, "Well, don't call me when you end up in the emergency room."

I felt like Rodney Dangerfield.

By '97, I was feeling better about myself: I'd added acupuncture, workouts, prayer,meditation and

vitamins to my health regimen. My physician at the time,though, was cold and distant. I dreaded each visit. He rushed examinations and talked too fast. I'd enter confident and leave confused.

Such experiences make me realize how blessed I am to have my present doc. That she's fiftysomething and Latina puts me at ease. She's also warm, caring—and don't take no shit from me. When I told her I'd had unprotected sex with a positive partner, she said, "Do you love him enough to die for him?" She was right: The risk of reinfection or an STD wasn't worth it.

A few years ago, right around the time I found my doc, I started having serious health issues:night sweats, pneumonia, weight loss, skin problems. Her unwavering support and assurances that others have recovered from similar illnesses have made all the difference. My doc affirms the value of my ongoing healing and empowerment and helps me to be a person with HIV who is joyous and free.

During a recent visit, she said something that made me certain she was Dr. Right: "Mark, you've made tremendous progress: You're so serene now. When we began working together, you were such a bitch." I laughed so hard my stomach was in knots. The truth hurts—and it sets you free.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Doctor-Feel-Good-2030-1218