



Does Your Doctor Need to Take Stigmavir to Treat HIV Stigma?

Watch an ad for the fictitious drug Stigmavir. Casey House's clever commercial is part of its campaign to fight HIV stigma.

May 31, 2024 By [Trent Straube](#)

[HIV](#) stigma in health care is real and harmful. Fortunately, health care providers can now take the antiviral drug Stigmavir to treat their [stigma](#). Unfortunately, the drug is fictitious, but you can watch a real ad for it at the top of this story and [on YouTube](#).

[Casey House](#), an AIDS service provider in Toronto, created the commercial as a public service announcement. It's the latest installment in the organization's long-running "Smash Stigma" campaign. At first serious and straightforward, the Stigmavir ad morphs into a musical that's set to a version of "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor—the legendary diva herself even provided the rights to the song, [according to a press release about the campaign](#). Here's a snippet of lyrics from the PSA:

"First I was afraid, I was petrified," sings a doctor mid-surgery. "I knew the science, but I was scared, I was shook inside. Then I took a pill and researched all night long, and I grew strong, and I learned how to carry on."

"I stigmatized, all the time," a dentist chimes in. "Looking back at my behavior, it should have been a crime."

"I should have trusted science, grounded in reality. Instead I broke the trust that my patient had in me," adds an anesthesiologist. "Now Stigmavir—it made things clear."

I'm finally cured now: no more HIV fear."

Despite advancements in HIV treatment, stigma persists—including in health care settings. According to the Canadian AIDS service provider, one in five people living with HIV are denied health services because of stigma and discrimination.

For people living with HIV, stigma is one of the most

reported barriers to accessing health care.

@CaseyHouseTO's new campaign, Stigmavir, is here to smash HIV stigma and invite health care professionals to create compassionate spaces for those living with or at risk of HIV. ♥ Check out stigmavir.ca for more information #SmashStigma

Posted by [Casey House Toronto](#) on Thursday, May 30, 2024

"Stigma remains a significant barrier for individuals living with HIV seeking access to health care," said Casey House CEO Joanne Simons in the press statement. "This year we're inviting other health care providers to join us in the mission to create positive health care spaces that are informed, sensitive, inclusive, and inquisitive rather than assumptive. Everyone deserves health care that meets their needs, treats them with respect and maintains confidentiality."

"Despite the scientific advancements in health care and increased knowledge of HIV, unfortunately stigma still exists," added Eileen de Villa, MD, Toronto's medical officer of health. "Health care leaders like Casey House play a crucial role in educating Canada's health care providers on what stigma-free care truly involves. Initiatives like Stigmavir not only raise awareness of overlooked issues but also empower health care providers with the essential tools and resources to offer compassionate care to their patients."

"Smash Stigma" recently launched short documentary videos about HIV stigma in health care settings; they include interviews with health care professionals and patients. You can view the series on [Casey House's YouTube channel](#). Two are posted below:

In addition to the PSA, Casey House also created an HIV stigma-free symbol. It's a badge that, like the LGBTQ flag, can be displayed—at a clinic, for example—to show support. (The badge icon appears on the Stigmavir box.) Casey House also encourages folks to share the ads on social media, using the hashtag #SmashStigma. You can download the badge and additional information on the campaign at SmashStigma.ca.

As the website states: "Positive health care spaces make people living with HIV feel welcome and

respected; resulting in stronger relationships with health care providers, better quality of care, and more positive health outcomes.”

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