Doctor Who Treated People With HIV Was Among Those Slain at Synagogue

"Before there was effective treatment for HIV, he was known in the community for keeping us alive the longest."

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A family physician beloved in the HIV and gay communities of Pittsburgh was among the 11 people killed Saturday during a mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue.

"My doctor Jerry Rabinowitz was among those killed in the Pittsburgh Synagogue shooting. He took care of me up until I left Pittsburgh for NYC in 2004," writes AIDS activist Michael Kerr in a memorial he posted on Facebook (you can read that entire post at the bottom of this page).

"In the old days for HIV patients in Pittsburgh he was [the one] to go to," Kerr recalls in that post. "Basically before there was effective treatment for fighting HIV itself, he was known in the community for keeping us alive the longest. He often held our hands (without rubber gloves) and always hugged us as we left his office.…

"[T]hank you Dr. Rabinowitz for having always been there during the most terrifying and frightening time of my life. You will be remembered by me always. You are one of my heroes just like the early ACT UP warriors—some of which I now call friend."

In a follow-up post (which you can read above), Kerr posted a 2017 photo of himself protesting with ACT UP, the AIDS activist group. "I never got to tell you personally I made it through this HIV mess—but I know you'd be proud," Kerr states. "This would be the perfect picture I'd send to you to say thank you and look at me now."

In numerous obituaries and memorials, many patients of Rabinowitz's, express similar gratitude. Jan Grice, who has the autoimmune disease lupus, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that Rabinowitz, 66, "just was the kind of doctor that treated the whole person. You could go to him and present a jumble of physical symptoms and emotional reactions," and he could sort it all out.

A New York Times article on Rabinowitz, titled "Family Doctor Killed in Pittsburgh Shooting 'Held a Lamp Up That Lit the Way,'" further highlighted Kerr's testimonial. And The Daily Beast reports

that Rabinowitz was sought out by gay men as early as the late 1970s, before AIDS had a name.

“I got care as good as I would have had I been in New York or San Francisco,” Kerr told the Daily Beast. “He never said, ‘It will be OK’ or ‘Don’t worry.’ He had lost patients. But he showed me I was being cared for, and he appreciated that I was scared.”

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