Larry Kramer Demands an HIV Cure at 2015 GMHC Spring Gala

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Kelsey Louie (left) and Larry Kramer at 2015 GMHC Spring Gala
Photo credit: Matthew McDermott

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) held its 2015 spring gala Monday, March 23, at Cipriani on 42nd Street in New York City. Proceeds from the annual fundraiser support GMHC programs and services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Celebrity guests included Jonathan Groff (Looking) and Raul Esparza (Law & Order: Special Victims Unit), as well as Edie Windsor, the plaintiff in the U.S. Supreme Court case that struck down a key part of the Defense of Marriage Act.

Former GMHC board chair Myron Sulzberger ("Mickey") Rolfe was honored, as well as GMHC co-founder Larry Kramer. The longtime activist and writer was estranged from the organization, but was pleased to return to accept the honor.

An excerpt from a transcript of Kramer's remarks:

"The main difference between the Larry Kramer who helped to start Gay Men's Health Crisis in his living room in 1982 and ACT UP in 1987 and the Larry Kramer who stands before you now is that I no longer have any doubt that our government is content, via sins of omission or commission, to allow the extermination of

my homosexual population to continue unabated.

"It is talk like this that got the original GMHC board to boot me off and out.

“It is also talk like this that enabled ACT UP to succeed in getting us our own treatments. These treatments are not good enough but have been good enough to extend our lives. Unfortunately they still come with side effects and they reward their greedy manufacturers with more money than they would make locating the cure that would end this plague.”

Watch Kramer’s full remarks starting at 9:20 in the video:

According to the transcript, Kramer was convinced to return in part by Kelsey Louie, the new GMHC chief executive officer, who told him that the group would “be more aggressive on all fronts — especially in our public remarks.”

Louie demonstrated that new commitment to outspokenness during his remarks at the event, which made a case for advocating for the cure.

An excerpt from a transcript of Louie’s remarks:

"I am troubled by how little activism there is challenging the systems to drive innovation rather than simply fund more programs. The systems in place are not

incentivizing innovation, and we are not demanding better treatments. Today’s treatments are great advances. They are, however, yesterday’s advances ...

"Complacency has set in. ’Advocates’ have sided with insurers, policy makers and industry to agree that ’this’ is good enough. When, for instance, did HIV organizations start agreeing that treatment decisions should be made by insurers and expert panels, not by patients and their doctors? When did preferred drug lists, high co-pays and specialty tiers become acceptable?

“Our aspirations must go well beyond a menu of expanded programs. The aspiration must go beyond mathematical models that calculate when we will ’bend the curve’ on new transmissions. Our collective aspiration should be nothing short of a cure.”

Watch Louie’s full remarks starting at 4:30 in the video:

Kramer closed his remarks by concurring that an HIV cure should be the goal: “The battle cry now must be one word — cure, cure, cure!”

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