HIV Cure Research Day 2021

Debunk nine HIV cure myths and watch a livestream discussion titled “Curing HIV: Healing the Mind, Body and Spirit.”

December 14, 2021 By Trent Straube

Surely, most POZ readers know about World AIDS Day, held each December 1, and are likely familiar with other days of observance, including National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (February 7), HIV Vaccine Awareness Day (May 18) and National HIV Testing Day (June 27). So far, 16 such events are recognized nationally (POZ offers a roundup of those HIV Awareness Days here as well as in a printable PDF poster).

Well, here’s another one to add to your calendar: HIV Cure Research Day, observed each December 14. The day was launched in 2016 by advocate Kimberly Knight and Allison Mathews, PhD, a research fellow in faith and health at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Mathews is also the executive director of Wake Divinity’s Faith Coordinating Center, which focuses on HIV.

Graphics for HIV Cure Research Day, December 14Courtesy of AIDSVu.org

Currently, HIV Cure Research Day is officially recognized only by the state of North Carolina, but the subject is worth a national and global spotlight. This year, AIDSVu, an interactive online tool that translates HIV data into maps and infographics, teamed up with the awareness day's cofounders to get the word out about HIV Cure Research Day.

One of AIDSVu's graphics depicts nine common HIV cure myths and the facts that debunk them. For example, one myth states, "Magic Johnson is cured of HIV." The fact is: "Magic Johnson is not cured of HIV. He has repeatedly said he still has HIV and is taking medication to manage the disease."

Another myth: "If they can develop a vaccine for COVID-19 so fast, they can do it for HIV too." The fact is: "Scientists have been working to develop a vaccine for HIV for nearly 40 years. The HIV virus is more complex than COVID-19 because it mutates much more rapidly inside the body, making it difficult to develop a vaccine that responds to all variants."

> This #HIVCureDay it is important to understand the work being done to find a cure for #HIV. Read more today: https://t.co/iX7vGcpdzJ pic.twitter.com/JGGrjbn7XM
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> — AIDSVu (@AIDSVu) December 14, 2021

AIDSVu also includes an interview with Mathews. She says, in part:

> I cofounded HIV Cure Research Day with my friend and colleague Kimberly Knight. Kimberly Knight got connected to the work because her husband died from complications with AIDS. We met when I was doing the crowdsourcing contest and she wanted to contribute her knowledge and experience around social work and public relations. We became this powerhouse couple, best friends who were doing a lot of community engagement work. I hosted a hip-hop concert around conspiracy theories about HIV cures. We did a fashion show with Sheryl Lee Ralph. We had interviews from celebrities like Viola Davis, Taraji P. Henson, Shirley Caesar and Lecrae. We also partnered with radio stations. We have done a lot already to get community members involved in finding a cure for HIV....
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> Addressing myths about how people can access medications and what it means to be cured, I think, is very important, because if we have learned anything from COVID-19 it is important for

> the public to be educated about the clinical trial process. We need to make sure that we have representation in clinical trials so that when the medications are developed, they are developed in a way that is both responsive to and reflective of the diversity of our population and that is accessible to people of all races, ethnicities and incomes.

"HIV Cure Research Day seeks bold strategies to empower community members to transform the way that scientists, government entities, and businesses engage with low-income and marginalized people about research and health care access," writes AIDSVu.

"The day celebrates the life of Timothy Ray Brown, the first man cured of HIV," continues AIDSVu, adding that HIV Cure Research Day also "highlights advancements in HIV cure science and facilitates community involvement in identifying novel ways to end the epidemic through research, technology, policy, and social justice."

To learn more about Brown, aka "the Berlin Patient," who died in 2020 of cancer after being cured of HIV, check out the collection of POZ articles in #Timothy Ray Brown.

Above, you can watch a TEDx Talk by Wake Divinity's Mathews titled "Fight HIV Stigma Through Access, Mobilization and Equity."

In related news, you can read about the February 2021 inauguration of Wake Divinity's Faith Coordinating Center, which was made possible by a $5 million grant from Gilead's COMPASS (COMmitment to Partnership in Addressing HIV/AIDS in Southern States) initiative. The article includes a video about the university's HIV efforts.

And you can stay up to date on cure research by clicking the Hot Topic hashtag #Cure.

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