Message of Love

Our January/February cover guys—David Massey and Johnny Lester (aka David & Johnny)—are a serodiscordant couple.

January 7, 2019 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I'm grateful for having love in my life. That includes family and friends, but I'm especially thankful for having a partner by my side for nearly 13 years. His love has given me more than I could have ever predicted.

As a serodiscordant couple—I'm living with HIV, and he is HIV negative—we also realize how important it is to share our magnetic status with others. In fact, we did so in a 2012 national campaign titled "Let's Stop HIV Together" from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

However, the need for us to continue disclosing never seems to cease. I regularly share this information, and more often than not, the response is still one of shock or, at the very least, of discomfort. Such are the stigma and fear that persist about HIV transmission risk.

Thankfully, many couples of mixed HIV status are able to share their stories to help fight back against such discrimination. Our cover guys—David Massey and Johnny Lester (aka David & Johnny)—are one of them. David lives with HIV, and Johnny is HIV negative.

In addition to blogging for POZ, David & Johnny are part of the 2018 relaunch of "Let's Stop HIV Together." Their many endeavors include offering relationship advice and launching business ventures. They're even engaged to be married! Click here to read more about their journey.

Another important factor in dispelling stigma and fear about HIV transmission risk is biomedical prevention. The successes of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and treatment as prevention (TasP) have been game changers, especially the fact of "U=U" (undetectable equals untransmittable).

PrEP, TasP and U=U have not, however, dampened the desire for an HIV cure. There is arguably no goal in the fight against the virus that is more universal. That said, there have been many false hopes over the years. As a result, most folks are now more cautious in their optimism.

I understand the frustration with HIV cure research, which often leads to disbelief that a cure will ever happen. I've always been more optimistic on this topic. I believe that I will see a cure in my lifetime. I realize this timetable is unsatisfying to many of us, but taking the long view is key. Click here for more.

Believing in positivity is something that Guy Anthony knows a lot about. After he tested HIV positive in 2007 at age 21, Guy struggled with his diagnosis. Although it took him a few years to accept living with the virus, he has become a strong advocate.

After holding positions at various groups and authoring a book of advice for his fellow Black gay men, Guy is now president of Black, Gifted & Whole, a nonprofit that empowers, educates and mobilizes Black queer men through sexual health awareness, higher education and access to resources. Click here for more.

Another advocate with many roles under his belt is Venton Hill-Jones. He is now CEO of a newly launched organization—the Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network. Click here to read our Q&A with Venton.

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