Why Mr. Gay New Zealand, Who Is HIV Positive, Has Condomless Sex

After winning the sash, Charlie Tredway penned an open letter to the HIV community.

February 15, 2017

Shortly after Charlie Tredway won the title of Mr. Gay New Zealand 2017 this past weekend, internet reports surfaced that he had been using a website for barebacking (condomless sex) the past year, reports GayZN.com.

Tredway is openly HIV positive and campaigned for the Mr. Gay New Zealand title with the goal of speaking out against HIV stigma. So does the barebacking revelation soil his sash? Not according to Tredway, who explained that he always discloses with his partners and that he has an undetectable viral load, which means it is virtually impossible for him to transmit the virus.

“I got my HIV from a partner who didn’t tell me he had the virus. So I’m always open and transparent about that,” he said. “I believe people need to have that information to make their decision.”

Tredway underscores that he is not advocating for everyone to ditch condoms. Instead, “we need to be having a frank discussion about safe sex and sexual health, not as it was in the late ’90s and early 2000s—but as it is now in 2017. And we are in a time where we have more highly effective, scientifically proven tools than ever before that can turn the tide on new transmissions. But we need to give airtime and thought to all of them, as they are all vital and in tandem will achieve our goals. If this is a catalyst to that discussion, then I am, as always, willing to risk stigma to do exactly that.”

In an Eikon magazine YouTube post leading up to the Mr. Gay New Zealand contest (watch it below), Tredway had this to say:

> The reason I wanted to enter is because to my knowledge there’s never been an openly HIV-positive gay male in Mr. Gay New Zealand. That’s because the public perception is that we should be silent, we should be invisible, we should be ashamed because we’re not as good as the rest of the population. And I wanted to enter to challenge that, because I firmly believe that especially now in this time when there’s all these scientific advances and people can reach an undetectable viral load and look after their health, there’s nothing to fear for us. HIV isn’t a death sentence. It doesn’t make you a lesser person, and I think it’s time that we put

stigma to bed. I think that being Mr. Gay New Zealand would really help do that.

Upon winning, Tredway penned an open letter that was posted on Eikon, writing: “To the HIV-positive community both here in New Zealand and the rest of the world, I set my sights on this title for you, to show that living with HIV shouldn’t be a barrier to being our authentic selves with dignity.”

Tredway will now compete in the Mr. Gay World competition, held May 5 to 10 in Madrid and Maspalomas in Spain’s Canary Islands.

To read a collection of POZ articles on undetectable viral loads and treatment as prevention (TasP), click here.

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