On the Pill and on TV

Truvada drugmaker Gilead Sciences promotes HIV prevention and PrEP.

November 12, 2018 By Trent Straube

In 2012, the Food and Drug Administration approved daily HIV med Truvada as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). But it wasn't until this year that its manufacturer, Gilead Sciences, launched TV ad campaigns to boost awareness of the daily tablet that prevents people from contracting the virus. The first spots, which appeared in early June as part of a campaign titled "Healthysexual," didn't even mention PrEP; instead, they focused on HIV prevention, testing and sexual health in general. A related video series titled MyHealthysexualStories featured celebrity advocates Julian Walker, Carmen Carrera and Daniel Franzese sharing stories about addressing stigma and preventing HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Then came the aptly named "I'm on the Pill" campaign, in which a series of actors announce, "I'm on the pill…but it's not birth control." Airing on broadcast TV and other media platforms, the ads directly promote Truvada. What's more, like Gilead's earlier PrEP campaigns, this one features actors representing populations at higher risk for HIV: men who have sex with men, transgender women (notably those of color) and Black women who have sex with men.

"The goal of this new awareness campaign is to encourage more people to talk with a health care provider about their HIV risk and Truvada for PrEP as a potential HIV prevention option," says Douglas M. Brooks, senior director for community engagement at Gilead Sciences. "We hope to empower people with information and tools to have an informed discussion with their health care provider about their individual health."

An image from the “Healthysexual” campaignCourtesy of Gilead Sciences

Ad Age

By Trent Straube

Local AIDS organizations and health departments have been at the forefront of PrEP awareness campaigns (often with funding by pharma). A few of the standouts from 2018:

In this “Let’s Talk About PrEP” music video, the talented team at Chicago’s Howard Brown Health give the Salt-N-Pepa track a prevention twist, baby.

An still from “Let’s Talk About PrEP”Courtesy of YouTube/Howard Brown Health

The Los Angeles LGBT Center tapped gay music artist and model Milan Christopher to urge gay and bisexual Black men to be “PrEP’d AF” against HIV.

An image from the campaign “PrEP’d AF”Courtesy of Los Angeles LGBT Center

“!Listos!” (“Ready!”), the first-ever PrEP campaign “conceived in Spanish,” debuted in New York City and was created by the Latino Commission on AIDS and the city health department.

An image from the campaign “!Listos!”Courtesy of New York City Health Department

The San Francisco health department launched the “PrEP Supports” campaign to “reach out to African Americans, improve access and overcome disparities.”

An image from the campaign “PrEP Supports”Courtesy of San Francisco Health Department

With its fun and racy “Think About PrEP” campaign, the Washington, DC, health department had us thinking about you-know-what!

An image from the campaign “Think About PrEP”Courtesy of Washington, DC. Health Department

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