POZ Awards 2022 / Winners

Here are the winners as voted by POZ readers!

December 9, 2022

BEST CELEBRITY ADVOCATE

Demetre Daskalakis, MD

If you do a Google image search for “Dr. Demetre Daskalakis,” the first pic that appears is a sexy shot of the Columbia- and Harvard-educated doc in a suit with an unbuttoned shirt that exposes his muscled chest and a kinky leather harness. One could be forgiven for thinking the image is from a hookup app profile rather than a portrait of one of the most important physicians in the country: the director of the Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The sex-positive, openly gay, tattooed doctor has been working on behalf of the health of the LGBTQ community for years, starting with his work in New York City, which included attending sex parties and events to test for HIV and promote awareness. Last year, when monkeypox began its ugly spread in our communities, Daskalakis was called on to put his expertise as a medical professional and leader in the LGBTQ community to work as a member of the White House Monkeypox National Response Team. We couldn’t think of a better man to help us manage this newest outbreak than this super smart, compassionate, sexy, fabulous doctor.

BEST IN FILM OR TELEVISION

Don Quixote in Newark (Documentary Film)

The impact of illness has always been more acute in poor minority populations and most heartbreaking among the youth of those populations. In the early days of HIV, when many medical professionals shied away from the mysterious illness, James Oleske, MD, a young immunologist and infectious disease specialist in Newark stepped up. Directed by Joseph Dorman, this film tells the story of Oleske and his work in the early 1980s. Before the virus even had a name, he noticed that babies were suffering from the mysterious illness that at the time was being seen only in gay men and IV drug users. Medical specialists and even his mentor thought Oleske’s discovery was medically impossible, but the independent doctor refused to back down. He was the first to discover HIV in children, which rendered him a leader in combating the virus in children around the world. The film premiered on PBS and is available for streaming on Amazon Prime.

BEST IN VISUAL ARTS

Tub Talks With Damon L. Jacobs

Licensed family therapist, national PrEP and harm reduction champion and sex-positive HIV advocate Damon L. Jacobs launched this series of interviews on YouTube last year. What makes these videos extra exciting is that the mental health professional and his guests shed their clothing and conduct their conversations while sharing a bubble bath. Because all of them are naked, they are also more vulnerable and have real and honest conversations about everything, including sex, love, connection, HIV, gender and more. Jacobs has interviewed major players in the HIV community, sex workers and friends, and the conversations are frank, funny and smart—not to mention a little titillating.

BEST IN LITERATURE

The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide by Steven W. Thrasher

Groundbreaking LGBTQ scholar, social critic and journalist Steven W. Thrasher, PhD, has spent his career studying HIV criminalization and how the virus has been policed in marginalized communities. This vital and potent book explores how viruses can expose the vast inequalities in our society, something we witnessed all too recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Friends, activists and teachers shared their heartbreaking stories of navigating the coronavirus, HIV and other viruses with Thrasher, uncovering the devastating effects of privilege. The Viral Underclass is a powerful book that helps us to understand more fully the differences that determine who receives care when society is facing the deadly effects of a mysterious virus.

BEST REASON TO KEEP ACTING UP

HIV Criminalization

Acquiring a virus should not be a crime, but 35 states still have laws on the books that criminalize HIV. These laws were implemented during the early days of the AIDS epidemic, designed to discourage high-risk behavior and promote safer sex options. They were also written at a time when little was known about HIV and there were no treatments available. In the current age of PrEP, PEP and the fact that people living with HIV on successful treatment have zero risk of transmitting the virus (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable!), the only reason laws criminalizing people living with HIV exist is to promote fear and stigma. They must be abolished.

Congratulations to the winners!

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