



2022 POZ Award Winners

In an article titled “[POZ Awards 2022: Winners](#),” the POZ editors compiled the winners, as voted on by readers, of the 7th Annual POZ Awards, which spotlighted HIV and AIDS in media and culture. Below is an edited excerpt.

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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, who is currently 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. When monkeypox (mpox) began to spread, he was called on to serve as a member of the White House Monkeypox National Response Team.

BEST IN FILM OR TELEVISION

Don Quixote in Newark (Documentary Film)

The impact of illness has always been acute among poor minority youth. 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 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 kids, which rendered him a leader in combating the virus in children around the world.

BEST IN VISUAL ARTS

Tub Talks With Damon L. Jacobs

Licensed family therapist, national pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and harm reduction champion and sex-positive HIV advocate Damon L. Jacobs launched this series of interviews on YouTube in 2021. What makes these videos extra exciting is that Jacobs and his guests shed their clothing and conduct their conversations while sharing a bubble bath. As a result, they are 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 the lack of privilege. *The Viral Underclass* 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 30 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. They were also written at a time when little was known about HIV and no treatments were available. In the current age of PrEP, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and the fact that people living with HIV on successful treatment do not transmit the virus (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable!), the only reason laws criminalizing people living with HIV remain on the books is to promote fear and stigma. They must be abolished.