R.I.P. Stephen Karpiak, PhD, Pioneering HIV and Aging Specialist

While at GMHC and ACRIA, Stephen Karpiak brought attention to the growing number of people aging with HIV. [VIDEO]

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Stephen Karpiak, PhD, a renowned researcher in the field of HIV and aging, died October 16, 2021, reports GMHC, an AIDS service provider in New York City.

For nearly two decades, Karpiak was the senior director for research and evaluation at AIDS Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA), which is now part of GMHC. At ACRIA, he launched the Research on Older Adults with HIV (ROAH) study and oversaw clinical trials for HIV medications. ROAH was pivotal in bringing attention to the growing population of people aging with HIV.

In a 2020 interview with AIDSVu about the health of people aging with HIV, Karpiak spoke about this population and its unique needs. “Today, almost 60% of all people living with HIV in the U.S. are over the age of 50. By the end of the next decade, the number of older adults with HIV will rise to 70%,” Karpiak said. “These older adults with HIV need supportive social services that go beyond typical clinical care, which is essentially disease management. Most (65% to 70%) live alone, estranged from their families and friends as a function of AIDS-associated stigma. Their social isolation is a protective choice they make, fearing the negative reaction of people when they discover their serostatus. They constantly face barriers to accessing care.”

Karpiak had served as senior director for applied and translational research at GMHC’s Center on HIV & Aging since 2017; he also founded and directed GMHC’s National Resource Center on HIV and Aging.

“His work helped to support the establishment of the annual HIV and Aging Awareness Day in September as well as the White House Conference on HIV and Aging,” noted a press statement by GMHC. “Everyone at GMHC—and all who worked with and knew Dr. Karpiak—will miss his dedicated expertise, advocacy and passion for supporting older adults living with HIV.”

For a glimpse into his work and engaging personality, watch the 30-minute video above, titled “Being a Researcher and Community Advocate in HIV and Aging.” The lecture was presented at

the International Workshop on HIV and Aging in 2019.

Karpiak received his doctorate in neurobiology and immunology from Fordham University, according to his LinkedIn account. He was a senior research scientist and associate professor at Columbia University Medical School from 1974 to 1994, before devoting his skills to LGBTQ, HIV and aging issues.

He was a member of the Einstein-Rockefeller-Hunter Center for AIDS Research and the HIV-AGE initiative of the American Academy of HIV Medicine and the American Geriatrics Society, according to GMHC. In addition, Karpiak was on the faculty of the New York University School of Nursing and published over 150 peer-reviewed scientific papers.

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