TV Dating Show Contestant Says He Was Pressured to Reveal HIV Status

Does a person with an undetectable viral load pose a risk to a dinner date?

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Alex Causton-Ronaldson was looking forward to being on a reality TV show called First Dates in which he was to be set up with a male dinner companion on a blind date that would be filmed. But as BuzzFeed News reports, that excitement took a dark turn when the producers tried to force him to reveal his HIV status to the date because they deemed him to be a risk.

The producers of the hit U.K. show found out about Causton-Ronaldson's status because he disclosed it during a phone interview with the show's psychotherapist. He thought it was a confidential conversation to evaluate his mental health, he told BuzzFeed, adding that he takes daily HIV meds and has an undetectable viral load.

"I was shaking I was so angry and so upset," he told BuzzFeed. "I had a boyfriend pretty much the whole time I'd been [HIV-] positive who'd been OK with my status and no one I'd dated had turned me down because of my status.... Suddenly all my fears about being HIV-positive and being rejected that I hadn't experienced became realized. And this wasn't by a person, this was by a national broadcaster."

Aware of his rights and of the science of transmission, Causton-Ronaldson informed the producers that their tactics amounted to discrimination. He also challenged the idea that he posed a risk.

"I said, 'There are three presumptions here. 1.) That I'm not undetectable. I am, but no one thought to ask me that and therefore I have the right to disclose to whoever I want to. 2.) That I'm going to fancy him. 3.) That I'm going to have sex with him without a condom."

The production team backed down, and Causton-Ronaldson went on the date without disclosing his status. The episode aired earlier this year; the two men didn't hit it off. Here's a tweet from the show regarding the episode:

Oh dear... Alex is in a wee bit of trouble. ????

#FirstDates pic.twitter.com/eBATiQtBWM

— First Dates (@FirstDates) April 19, 2016

Despite winning his battle with the producers, Causton-Ronaldson now says the experience left a negative impact on his life. “It perpetuated the idea that I’m a risk and unclean—all these myths out there about HIV,” he told BuzzFeed. “It made me feel awful. My self-confidence took such a knock because of it. And I only disclosed it in that psychological assessment because I thought it was confidential. It set my self-esteem about living with HIV back quite significantly. I got very low for a couple of months.”

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