When I Was Young

Young people account for 21% of new HIV diagnoses annually. Our April/May issue looks at ways to raise HIV awareness among youth.

March 29, 2021 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I'm not what you'd call a very dramatic person (although my partner would likely disagree). However, I will admit to getting incensed from time to time. The past few years certainly gave me good reasons to scream.

As with most people, I suspect, my level of aggravation increases the more personal things get. So when it comes to youth and HIV, I become vexed. Having tested HIV positive in 1992 at age 22, I know what it's like to be forced to learn to live with a potentially deadly retrovirus as adulthood starts.

Youth are as vulnerable as ever to HIV. The numbers speak for themselves. Nearly 45% of people between ages 13 and 24 who are HIV positive don't know they are living with the virus. Young people account for 21% of new HIV diagnoses annually.

When it comes to LGBTQ young people, the numbers are even more distressing. Of all new HIV diagnoses among youth, 83% are among men who have sex with men (MSM). Black adolescents account for 42% of all new diagnoses among young MSM.

These statistics are why National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is so important. Observed each year on April 10, this day gives everyone a chance to focus on how we can help make things better. Supporting youth advocates is a great place to start.

Our cover subject, Deondre Moore, is an excellent example. When he tested HIV positive at 19 years old, he didn't know all the facts about the virus. Now 26, he's sharing those facts with his fellow young people as the U.S. partnerships and community engagement manager at Prevention Access Campaign. Click here to read more about raising HIV awareness among youth.

Two advocates who also know something about testing HIV positive as youth are Dey Armbrister and Derek Canas. Click here and here, respectively, to find out more.

Low HIV testing rates and stigma are a few of the reasons young people are unaware of their status. However, inadequate sex education is the reason many youth advocates cite for the high rate of new HIV diagnoses among young people. Sex ed that includes LGBTQ people is key to

turning the tide.

Another key to ending the HIV epidemic is even more elusive—an HIV vaccine. Although it's true that COVID-19 still keeps us on edge, the future on that front is looking brighter. The main reasons for hope are the COVID-19 vaccines. Their increasing rollout could soon give us a reprieve from the new coronavirus.

Since we got COVID-19 vaccines in record time, many in the HIV community have been sharing their frustration with the pace of HIV vaccine research. Why are they taking so long? Click here to learn just how difficult the task has been—and find out how much COVID-19 vaccines owe to HIV vaccine research.

Promoting sex ed and advancing HIV research were two causes the late Joseph Sonnabend, MD, certainly knew a lot about. The researcher and clinician was a trailblazer in the fight against HIV/AIDS. He graced our cover in 1998 and blogged regularly for POZ. Click here to read remembrances of Joe.

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