How an HIV Science Breakthrough Took Away My Fear and Shame

Roscoe Boyd, Founding Member of the U=U Steering Committee, shares how the good news changed his life

November 16, 2017 By Undetectable = Untransmittable

This is a guest blog by Roscoe Boyd II, Founding Member of the U=U Steering Committee.

I have been very public in sharing that I am a person who has lived with HIV for the past 16 years. I am healthy and motivated to make a difference in the lives of people like me, and to help end the stigma that leads to higher transmission rates, particularly in Black communities. It is a very emotional and deeply personal subject matter for me because for much of my life, I have lived in fear of being "discovered" and unconsciously developed a sense of worthlessness and undeserving, largely because of how people shame and judge HIV positive people.

Having a detectable viral load does not mean a person is "dangerous." But now that my viral load is undetectable, I'm at greater ease knowing that I can't transmit HIV to my partner.

"People living with HIV who are on treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot pass it on through sex!" The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed it, and The Lancet has written about it.

Having a detectable viral load does not mean a person is "dangerous." But now that my viral load is undetectable, I'm at greater ease knowing that I can't transmit HIV to my partner. This is empowering for me and for my ability to choose healthy outcomes for my life, especially when I consider my life's path.

At one time on my journey, I reached a very low point where I was struggling with health—both physical and mental—and trying to find myself, my purpose, and who I wanted to become. As a young black man with huge financial burdens and no job, it was a relief to find much-needed support in community-based organizations that were affirming and “got me”, without judgment. I learned that while many people in the community say they want to help, sometimes that “help” comes with strings attached, or they may not have the competence or ability to be helpful given my particular needs. This time, however, I knew something was different…in a good way.

I lived with HIV since 2001 and for many years, I felt insecurity, fear, helplessness… like death was near. I was so deep into drugs that they became a “safe place” for me.

At age 30, I found myself living in a shelter, working at a local burger joint, not really knowing what to do with my life. I lived with HIV since 2001 and for many years, I felt insecurity, fear, helplessness… like death was near. I was so deep into drugs that they became a “safe place” for me, as I’m sure they do for many who struggle. Never would I have guessed that this gifted kid from Detroit would be in this dark place…but there I was.

Roscoe Boyd and U=U Activists at USCA 2017

Thankfully, there were community members there to help me navigate what I saw as an

impossible situation to overcome, and to link me to services that improved my physical and mental health. I learned how to take a more positive approach to living. This collective of community was willing to accept me as I was without judgment, and to help me heal from these health traumas. They became part of my team in progressing and pushing me in meeting my goal of living a healthy, productive, long, and happy life. I landed a job at a global New York-based retailer, even though I had no retail experience. 2 ½ years later, I was close to the number 1 sales person in the entire company. I earned a brokerage license and became the top producer at an insurance firm in less than a year. And most recently, I started a Manhattan-based consulting company focused on health and wellness.

Over the last year, I have used my voice to share the good news of the U=U movement (Undetectable = Untransmittable) and garner support of community organizations and local, state, and federal government to recognize this truth. In the struggle, we used factual and verifiable scientific research that people who are living with HIV and maintain an undetectable viral load by taking antiretroviral therapy daily, are not able to pass the virus to others!

This breakthrough U=U science has changed my life. However, this information is not being provided to all communities.

This breakthrough U=U science has changed my life. I speak around the country as a health advocate, and help people heal from the psycho-social traumas experienced because of HIV stigma.

However, this information is not being provided to all communities.

Everyone needs to know the facts and gatekeepers must, also, be willing to acknowledge the science and help us eliminate the stigma that keeps so many people feeling undeserving of love and their best life.

Policymakers must understand that U=U means access to treatment and care which will not only save our lives, but is essential to stopping HIV transmission and to ending the epidemic.

Roscoe Boyd with other NY community and medical experts at NY State DOH's U=U Expert Panels. Credit: Sam Shoemaker

As a man of faith, I know that God loves everyone and that the God I love, loves me unconditionally. My journey has convinced me to keep my heart open to love, and to stand in the gap for those who cannot. Everyone living with HIV regardless of viral load is worthy of love. I am not ashamed. I am not afraid. I am thankful for the support, encouragement, and love that I have received in sharing my story, my pain, and my truth.

Roscoe Boyd II

Founding Member

U=U Steering Committee

Pronouns: He, Him, His

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

Prevention Access Campaign

#UequalsU

For resources, check out **www.uequalsu.org**

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The evidence is clear: People with HIV on effective treatment *cannot transmit* HIV through sex.

The CDC confirms “effectively no risk” of HIV transmission.

The Lancet proclaims “U=U is a simple but hugely important campaign based on a solid foundation of scientific evidence.”

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/hiv-science-breakthrough-took-away-fear-shame