Online Gay Soap Opera Raises HIV Awareness

July 22, 2008 By Peter Staley

With many HIV negative gay men using “disease free, UB2” as their only foolish prevention tool, and most poz guys staying mum about their status due to stifling stigma, we are in desperate need of ways to talk about HIV prevention. Here’s one approach that’s worth trying, although like many efforts at HIV prevention, it might end up only preaching to the converted. In other words, will young gay men who want to keep HIV out of mind watch these and discuss them?

As recently posted in the Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report:

> Los Angeles Times Examines Online Soap Opera That Aims To Raise HIV Awareness Among MSM [Jul 11, 2008]
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> The Los Angeles Times on Friday examined an online soap opera that aims to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and promote safer-sex practices among men who have sex with men. According to the *Times*, the show is part of a “wave of new programs” that aims to “reinvigorate” HIV/AIDS outreach in the MSM community.
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> The show, called “In the Moment,” is a “racy, unvarnished portrait” of MSM in Los Angeles, but “at its core” is about HIV/AIDS, the *Times* reports. The first episode was released in January and introduced the multicultural cast, including two characters named Mike and Steve who have unprotected sex. In the second episode, released in March, another character named Shawn “scores a date,” while Steve discovers Mike cheated on him and moves out, the Times reports. According to the Times, advocates are “pushing” the show as a way to promote discussions about safer sex and relationships.

> The show has drawn more than 80,000 viewers in the last few months, and most production costs were funded by the city of West Hollywood, the *Times* reports. Most of the people working on the show are volunteers, including the actors. The short “webisodes” have a “high-quality” appearance, which are “propped up” by support from various companies and individuals, the Times reports. The first two episodes cost about $17,000 to produce, and West Hollywood is expected to fund new episodes soon. The show has “struggled to land more government money,” mostly because the federal government is “squeamish about funding images deemed ’explicit,’” according to the *Times*.
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> Susan Cohen -- director of health education and prevention at the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center, which produces the show -- said that in terms of reaching MSM to raise awareness about the disease, the center “needed to be where the guys are,” which is on the Internet. James Key, chief public affairs officer at the center, said that “we’ve had to find new ways to engage” MSM about HIV/AIDS. “Times have changed,” Key said, adding, “And we’ve had to change with them” (Gold, *Los Angeles Times*, 7/11).

Check out both episodes here, then comment below...

Episode One

Find more videos like this on In The Moment

Episode Two

Find more videos like this on In The Moment

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