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GOTHAM GIGS

Care technician by day, HIV/AIDS fighter by night

Victor Hogue hits up the clubs to educate patrons about PrEP, the HIV-prevention drug also known as Truvada

[Caroline Lewis](#)



Buck Ennis

Victor Hogue with a table of condoms and HIV/AIDS prevention literature to promote PrEP.

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The outreach table covered in condoms and HIV-prevention pamphlets that pops up every few weeks at Castro, a gay bar in Washington Heights, is low on the list of attractions there. As the Thursday after Valentine's Day turned into Friday, the DJ played deafening hip-hop, augmented by a live drummer and colorful strobe lights. Patrons danced and flirted, blew smoke from hookahs and watched male performers in nothing but briefs grind on top of the bar.

Undistracted, Victor Hogue, a care technician at the Ryan/Chelsea-Clinton Community Health Center in Hell's Kitchen, approached a reveler in a stylish white sweater to ask if he knew about PrEP. Screaming into each other's ears at close range, he learned that the man had several friends who were taking the daily pill, which helps prevent HIV transmission.

Victor Hogue

AGE 28

BORN Mississippi

RESIDES Harlem

EDUCATION B.S. in biology and chemistry, Tennessee State University; Master of Public Health,

Meharry Medical College

BIG PRIZE On Dec. 1, 2015 (World AIDS Day), Hogue received the Commissioner's Special Recognition Award from the state Department of Health for his HIV/AIDS outreach and advocacy work.

WALLFLOWER "I'm not really a club-type person," said Hogue, who lives with two roommates in Harlem. He said he'll party every once in a while, but prefers relaxing at a lounge or bar with his friends.

The people Hogue talks to at gay bars around the city are more likely to be aware of PrEP (often known by the brand name Truvada) than they were when he began his work a year and a half ago. "I feel like New York is really pushing it," he said. "Everywhere you go—trains, bus stops—you see it."

Despite early concerns that PrEP would encourage promiscuity and lessen condom use, promoting it has become a key part of a city and state program to "End the Epidemic" of HIV/AIDS, and is the centerpiece of the city's "Play Sure" campaign. From a high of 15,000 new cases a year in the 1990s, New York state saw more than 3,000 cases of HIV diagnosed in 2013. The state recently set aside \$15 million to make the drug more available.

After Hogue's conversation partner defected to the dance floor, he noted the man's gender, age range (24 to 50), race (black) and primary language (English) on a sheet he shared with three colleagues. When the crew packed up after 90 minutes, they had spoken to 27 people, almost all black and Hispanic men. At gay bars in Hell's Kitchen and Chelsea, the team often reaches about 50 people.

"People here just want to party and have a good time," said Hogue, who had arrived at work at 8:30 that morning and looked far too tired to join them.

Hogue, who counseled people with other chronic diseases at his previous job in Nashville, said he likes focusing on HIV prevention because it's so achievable. "My main goal is to get the word out about protecting yourself," he said.

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