



P.O. Box 1205 State College PA 16804-1205

[www.whospositive.org](http://www.whospositive.org)

[info@whospositive.org](mailto:info@whospositive.org)

Why was I foolish to never think HIV could infect me? Why is it that I never knew anyone my age that was HIV positive while growing up at a time when ½ of new HIV infections occur among my peers under the age of 25?

There is still so much stereotype and ignorance surrounding HIV, because of that young HIV positive adults rarely talk about being HIV positive. When no one talks about it you think it's not there, you think it can't happen to you. I never thought it would happen to me, in a small rural town in Pennsylvania, it did. My actions resulted in me testing positive 2.5 years ago; an active, respected young man, a college student struggling to make my way through school, a typical 24 year old who is like everyone else.

Good Morning, My name is Tom Donohue, 26 years old from State College, PA. I return today to this advisory committee meeting to help advise. I am the executive director and founder of Who's Positive, a national organization which humanizes HIV, to the point it becomes a prevention tool among young adults. Since my last appearance in front of this committee I clearly understand the need for you folks to move rapidly forwards approving the proposed over the counter HIV test. Our organization fully supports the technology of such a great tool in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Young adults need an alternative, they need to know they can find out their HIV status with not having to face someone to tell of their mistakes. They need a tool that will give them the information they need while not having to tell anyone other than themselves. This proposed OTC test offers that, a private way to know ones status without ever having to go to a clinic where a case worker will ask you what naughty things you have done to put yourself at risk, a way that provides support and care while still staying anonymous. We know that many young adults have never been tested, never been challenged to think they have put themselves at risk, many see learning about HIV as a task or requirement that their high school had to explain, so few ever think that they would ever be face to face with HIV. Society dictates that we only learn what HIV is, not what HIV looks like, how it acts, whose lives it changes, or how it affects people who are infected or affected. On a college campus such as Penn State University, you have 50,000 students, how many of them ever thought they could have been exposed to HIV? How many look at their crazy nights on the town or their spring break rendezvous as a risk for HIV. Who is opening the eyes of young adults to say "wake up"?

Society has yet to deliver a message that says HIV is in your neighborhood, your urgent attention is needed to help end this epidemic. Place a test in a supermarket, put up a huge sign in the window, NOW OFFERING RAPID HIV TESTS. Will this begin to tell society that HIV is important?

In numerous discussions we have had with young adults all over the US, we found that many times youth want to know their status but do not want to face a stranger face to face to disclose their mistakes or sexual habits. Many in a survey we conducted said that if accurate they would prefer an OTC test. Some expressed the need to have counseling. Who's Positive acknowledges the importance of pre and post counseling, currently it's been proposed that a 24 hr 7 day a week hotline be made available. Students said to us that during pre and post counseling many were never truthful on surveys, that in the moment of fear all they wanted was to get their test and leave. I know, I relate to what many of these youth have told me. I too preformed regular routine testing. Thank goodness. Otherwise, I could be out infecting others right now. I am not sick, I am not even on medications, so with out regular routine testing I would have no indication that I was infected, no reason to think for the last 2.5 years I could be infecting others, this mentality is what helps fuel the spread among young adults. On that campus of 50,000 students it is estimated that 100 students would be infected. This shocks PSU students. Maybe it's that popular jock who's unknowingly hooking up with all the pretty vulnerable freshmen girls on

campus who are just looking to be as popular, who is just dying to fit or be accepted in her sorority. What a story to tell her sorority sisters who all have been with this jock.

HIV did not only infect me but it affected so many around me. It is one moment of passion of intimacy of irresponsibility that changed my life forever. HIV/AIDS is so much more than three letters, those three letters represent faces and stories infected or affected by HIV; mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, friends, roommates. Society must wake up and understand they too probably have already been affected by HIV some know it others don't. Society must open its eyes to an epidemic that stares us in the face everyday of every year. Winning this fight against HIV/AIDS can not and will not be done by keeping our eyes closed.

You have a new tool in front of you to help reduce my peers, your sons or daughters, nephews or niece from being infected. Offer the alternative, give another option, continue this fight.

As a growing new non-profit organization, OraSure Technologies has now partnered with Who's Positive to help in giving us our own tools and helping us get on our feet. Just last week they provided funding to bring up a mobile testing unit from Philadelphia to provide rapid HIV testing. We had well over 150 students show up to be tested. Additionally, OraSure Technologies has accepted a partnership with us financially supporting an endeavor called OPERATION: Get Tested, where we will take 6 HIV positive youth from the east coast to the west coast taking stories and faces of HIV positive youth to schools and universities across the United States. They have also provided my transportation and hotel accommodations for this trip. With our limited funding, we were proud to once again be requested to make comments to this committee and continue to provide a youthful perspective on this subject. I would ask that these comments be submitted for the record and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have at anytime.

Thomas M. Donohue, Jr.  
Executive Director, Founder  
Who's Positive  
<http://www.whospositive.org>  
[tom@whospositive.org](mailto:tom@whospositive.org)