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His London Buyers Club Is Being Credited With Drop in HIV Cases

BuzzFeed | A few days before Christmas 2016, a phone call took place that no one could have predicted.

One of the world's most esteemed HIV doctors, Professor **Sheena McCormack**—whose life's work as an epidemiologist has been to track and fight the virus—picked up the phone to deliver a message that would make headline news: In the space of 12 months, the number of gay men in London being diagnosed with HIV had dropped by 40%. Across England it was down by a third.

No British doctor has been able to report a fall this steep in more than 35 years of the virus. It is the kind of figure that in medical circles is so large as to look jarring, even false; and yet it was true.

Behind this story lay a series of secret meetings and a network of people with one man at the centre who, unknown to **HIV**, continued on page 2

Genetic Link Might Hold Key to Ending Opioid Epidemic

Wired | On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your pain? Would you say it aches, or would you say it stabs? Does it burn, or does it pinch? How long would you say you've been hurting? And are you taking anything for it?

Steven Pete has no idea how you feel. Sitting in Cassava, a café in Longview, Washington, next to a bulletin board crammed with flyers and promises—your pain-free tomorrow starts today; remember: you're not alone in your battle against peripheral neuropathy!—he tells me he cannot fathom aches or pinches or the searing scourge of peripheral neuropathy that keep millions of people awake at night or hooked on pills. He was born with a rare neurological condition called congenital insensitivity to pain, and for 36 years he has hovered at or near a 1 on the pain scale. He's 5' 8", with glasses and thinning brown hair, and he has a **PAIN**, continued on page 3

Video | The Sleeping Dragon

Deep inside Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado, a military team works in one of the nation's most secure bunkers, on guard against a nuclear attack against the U.S. Read [the article](#) and take a [video tour](#) of complex.



Photo: Andrew Arthur Brees

When Anxiety and Depression Collide With Pregnancy

Marie Claire | When my daughter was about three months old, I attended a party with a bunch of other new moms. They were gushing—GUSHING—about parenthood. I stood silently in a circle of the rosiest faces you ever did see, wondering what on earth they were experiencing. Someone turned to me to ask how my daughter was.

DEPRESSION, continued on page 2

A Southern Christian Doctor's Journey to Providing Abortions

Newsweek | A 12-year-old girl showed up in **Dr. Willie Parker's** waiting room in Illinois. The girl was an incest victim, having been impregnated by her father, and she and her mother wanted her to have an abortion. The girl was stoic, which led Parker to conclude that she had figured out a way to project herself out of her traumatic predicament. "The right

ABORTION, continued on page 3



QUOTE-WORTHY

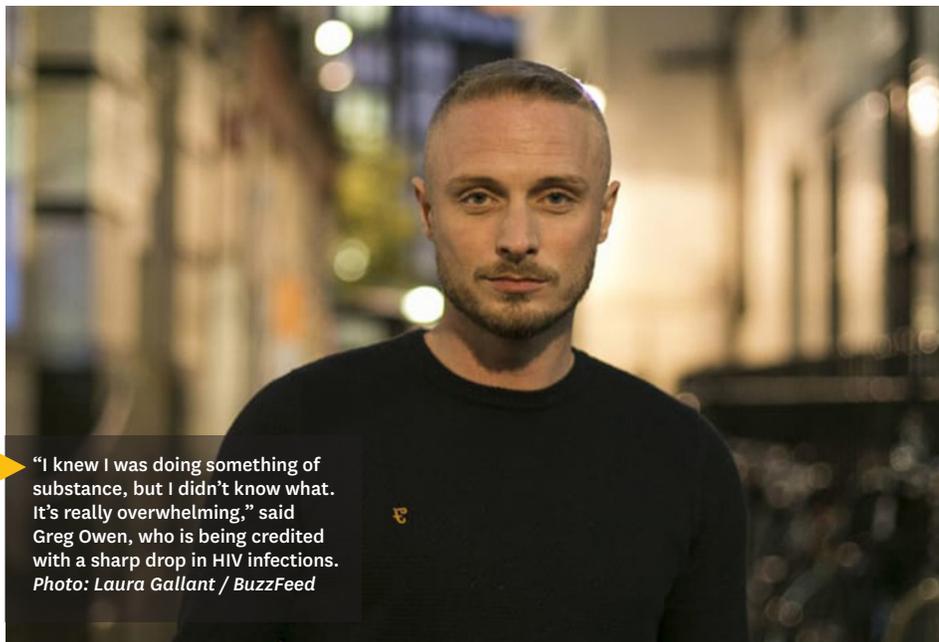


Photo: Mark Makela / For The New York Times

"I just don't see the importance of that piece of paper."
 —Karen Kanter, with Stan Tobin (left). Both 75, they live together but are not married (and they're not alone).

"We should be rewarding quality research that will make an impact on real people's lives."
 —Dr. John Ioannidis, on the crisis in research reliability

"That dust was like baby powder. We were covered in it."
 —Paul Laird, who helped clean up a Pacific island where soil was left radioactive by atomic tests. He and other ill veterans are being denied medical benefits by the military.



“I knew I was doing something of substance, but I didn’t know what. It’s really overwhelming,” said Greg Owen, who is being credited with a sharp drop in HIV infections. Photo: Laura Gallant / BuzzFeed

HIV, continued

the public, helped change medical history. His name is Greg Owen. He was the man McCormack phoned. Today his story is told in full for the first time.

Owen sits in an echoing meeting room in the BuzzFeed News office recalling that conversation, and what it was that McCormack really wanted to convey to him about those figures.

“She said, ‘Don’t look at the percentage; I want you to look at this another way. There are thousands of people who didn’t become HIV-positive this year because of you.’”

Owen started to cry. And after that call, he says, he used to cry every day.

“I knew I was doing something of substance, but I didn’t know what. It feels really good but it’s really overwhelming because how many people in my position get to do what I did?”

The man McCormack credited with this unprecedented reduction in HIV transmissions was not a fellow doctor, nor the head of a charity, nor even a politician. Owen is unemployed, a former sex worker, and homeless.

What he managed to pull off—and why—is so outlandish it warrants comparisons with Ron Woodroof, the AIDS patient depicted by Matthew McConaughey in *Dallas Buyers Club*, who in 1980s America smuggled in unauthorised HIV drugs for desperate

fellow sufferers.

The difference is that Woodroof’s was an outrageous story that ended in tragedy. Owen’s is a tragic story that ends in outrageous success.

In the summer of 2015, Owen was 35 and working part-time as a barman and club promoter. One of six children, from a

Greg Owen is neither a doctor nor a politician. He was unemployed and at the time sleeping on friends’ sofas.

working-class Catholic family in Northern Ireland, he had come to England to train as an actor before finding his way into London’s bacchanalian nightlife. That summer, he was trying to make a difficult decision.

He had heard about a new drug regime that was being used to prevent HIV. The medication’s brand name is Truvada, and the regime—which involves taking this antiretroviral pill every day—is dubbed PrEP: pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Read the [story](#), get global [statistics](#) on the number of people living with HIV, and find out [more](#) about the basics of PrEP in preventing infection. ■

DEPRESSION, continued

“She’s kind of a jerk?”

Audible gasps followed.

“I didn’t say I wished her dead. I’m just not enjoying the newborn phase.”

At the grocery store, strangers would ask if my baby was my “first.”

“She’s my only,” I’d respond. End of discussion.

I’d be chatting with close friends who were thinking about getting pregnant and my advice became, “I wouldn’t recommend it.”

“Really? But your kid is awesome!”

“I know, she’s incredible, I got very lucky. But yeah, no, really. If I had it to do over, I wouldn’t.”

If you think this makes me sound like a monster, you’ve probably never been a depressed new mother.

You know how you get teary-eyed at stories about mothers with cancer postponing treatment for the sake of their unborn children? Rarely do we treat women who suffer from deadly mental illnesses with the same compassion. (A documentary called *Moms and Meds* explores what happens when anxiety and depression collide with pregnancy by interviewing with moms at all stages of parenthood.) I’ve been there and it is a largely invisible struggle.

I knew about six months before I got married that I was going to try to get pregnant immediately. Lots of things factored into my decision, including my age (34 at the time) and uncertainty about how many children I even wanted: What if I loved pregnancy and motherhood?

Read the [story](#), find our [more](#) about pregnancy and depression, and get [information](#) on mixing medication with pregnancy. ■



WHO WE ARE: Hollywood, Health & Society, a program of The Norman Lear Center, is a free resource for writers with script questions about health, safety and security. Funders include the CDC, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, N Square, The SCAN Foundation, California Health Care Foundation and the Southern California Clinical and Translational Science Institute.

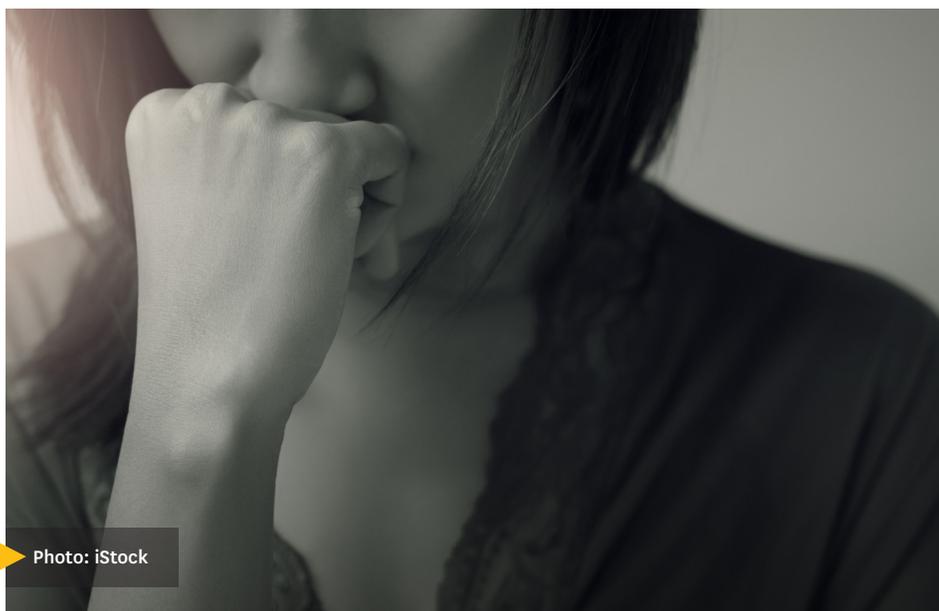


Photo: iStock

PAIN, continued

road map of scars across his body, mostly hidden beneath a T-shirt bearing the partial crests of Batman, Green Lantern, Flash, and Superman. Because he never learned to avoid injury, which is the one thing pain is really good for, he gets injured a lot. When I ask how many bones he's broken, he lets out a quick laugh.

"Oh gosh. I haven't actually done the count yet," he says. "But somewhere probably around 70 or 80." With each fracture, he didn't feel much of anything—or even notice his injury at all. Whether he saw a doctor depended on how bad the break appeared to be. "A toe or a finger, I'd just take care of that myself," he says, wagging a slightly bent index finger. "Duct tape."

What about something more serious? Pete pauses for a moment and recalls a white Washington day a few years ago. "We had thick snow, and we went inner-tubing down a hill. Well, I did a scorpion, where you take a running start and jump on the tube. You're supposed to land on your stomach, but I hit it at the wrong angle. I face-planted on the hill, and my back legs just went straight up over my head." Pete got up and returned to tubing, and for the next eight months he went on as usual, until he started noticing the movement in his left arm and shoulder felt off. His back felt funny too. He ended up getting an MRI. "The doctor looked at

my MRI results, and he was like, 'Have you been in a car accident? About six months ago? Were you skydiving?'"

"I haven't done either," Pete replied.

The doctor stared at his patient in disbelief. "You've got three fractured vertebrae." Pete had broken his back.

Throughout his body today, Pete has a strange feeling: "a weird radiating sensation," as he describes it, an overall discomfort but not quite pain as you and I know it. He and others born with his condition have been compared to superheroes—indomitable, unbreakable. In his basement, where the shelves are lined with videogames about biologically and technologically enhanced soldiers, there is even a framed sketch of a character in full body armor, with the words *painless pete*. But Pete knows better. "There's no way I could live a normal life right now if I could actually feel pain," he says. He would probably be constrained to a bed or wheelchair from all the damage his body has sustained.

His wife, Jessica, joins us at the café. She is petite and shy, with ice-blue eyes traced in black eyeliner. When I ask her what it's like to live with a man who feels no pain, she sighs. "I worry about him all the time."

Read the **story**, learn **more** about those who suffer from chronic pain, and get **information** about the opioid epidemic and what's being done to help **turn the tide**. ■

ABORTION, continued

answer was to end that pregnancy," he tells *Newsweek* over the phone.

Some Americans would feel for Parker in this situation, while others would think he committed a moral evil in carrying out the abortion, especially since the girl, at 23 weeks into her pregnancy, was just four weeks shy of entering her last trimester. This is one of the memories that has stayed with Parker, a 54-year-old African-American Christian traveling abortion provider in the Deep South. An outspoken advocate for reproductive justice, he estimates that he sees 50 women on his busiest day, performs at least 1,000 abortions a year and has completed more than 10,000 over his career.

As a physician, he didn't always perform abortions.

Parker describes other memorable encounters with patients and draws readers into his personal and professional evolution as an abortion provider in his personal narrative, *Life's Work: A Moral Argument for Choice*, which was released Tuesday. He argues that his profession is rooted in justice, and that the procedure is rooted in moral good.

Speaking from his own experiences of race and class discrimination, Parker compares restrictions on abortion to slavery. The physician, entirely bald with a salt-and-pepper beard, dressed in a blue pin-striped shirt and navy suit with a white pocket square tucked away, spoke Wednesday night at the Strand Book Store in New York City about how, in both circumstances, someone claims to know what's best for another individual and has control over that person's autonomy. "If you've never lived with your back against the wall," he said, "you won't get why a woman would go to any length to end a pregnancy they do not want."

Read the **story**, and find out **more** about a **study** on how abortion restrictions hurt the most vulnerable. ■

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