



Renaissance Researcher

By Ian Morton & Bryna Block

PROFILE: Davey Smith, MD

Dr. Davey Smith embodies the spirit of the AIDS Research Institute. Through his passion and excellence in HIV/AIDS research and clinical care, he lives our mission of creating change and progress in HIV prevention, diagnosis, and treatment on a local, national, and global level. A tireless researcher and renowned expert in HIV superinfection and transmission, Smith was honored in 2012 with a prestigious NIH Avant Garde award for HIV research. His international research spans Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. When he's not in the lab, Smith advocates enthusiastically for family-sensitive treatment and services for HIV+ women as a board member for Christie's Place, a San Diego agency. He also serves as Medical Director of the TN2 Clinics for MSM and transgendered populations at San Diego's Family Health Centers. In the lab, in the community, and across the globe, Davey Smith has become a respected leader in HIV/AIDS research and care.

As early as 1995, while attending East Tennessee State University, Smith began distinguishing himself as a leader with his election to the AOA Medical Honor Society. His gifts for both research and community service have been continually recognized with such honors as his selection as one of *Discover* magazine's "The Year In Science: Top 100 Stories in 2005," the Dr. A. Brad Truax Award (for outstanding achievement in HIV/AIDS service) by the County Of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency in 2009, and the 2010 HIV Medical Association Research Award from the Infectious Diseases Society of America.

2012 was a particularly good year for Dr. Smith, as he received the prestigious Avante-Garde Award for HIV/AIDS Research. This award, through the National Institutes of Health, is intended to stimulate high-impact research that may lead to groundbreaking opportunities for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in drug abusers. Smith and his colleagues will use this \$2.5 million grant over the next five years to develop a system that integrates patient demographics, geographic location, drug use and HIV strain data to map patterns of new HIV transmission hotspots.

This information will be used to tailor prevention resources that can be made quickly available to specific groups at risk for HIV infection, with the goal of stopping disease transmission, particularly among illicit substance abusers.

Dr. Smith says he was drawn to medicine and to HIV research as a means to exercise his "scientific curiosity, solve real-world problems, and directly help communities affected by HIV and AIDS." He graduated from East Tennessee State University medical school and then completed his internship, residency, and chief residency in Internal Medicine at UC San Diego, followed by a fellowship in Infectious Diseases. In 2003, he joined the UC San Diego faculty and is currently Associate Professor of Medicine in Residence.

"UC San Diego is a top (if not 'the' top) HIV research institution," Smith says. "Throughout the AIDS epidemic, UC San Diego has been at the forefront of almost all major HIV discoveries. UC San Diego has a long track record of thinking in big ways, and doing big things. I think this ethos comes from our great group of friendly, helpful, and highly collaborative investigators."

When Dr. Smith is not in the lab, you will find him collaborating on committees and review panels for such groups as NIH Study Sections, the AIDS Clinical Trials Group focused on the cure agenda, The International Symposium on NeuroVirology, the International AIDS Society, and the HIV Dynamics and Evolution conferences.

Dr. Smith is equally dedicated to community service. He is a permanent member of the San Diego County HIV Planning Council, and Chair of that Council's Standards of Care Committee. He is also the Board President of Christie's Place, a non-profit organization serving women and families affected by HIV in San Diego. And he serves as Medical Director of the Tuesday and Thursday Night Clinics at Family Health Services, which provide healthcare for gay men and transgendered persons.

Dr. Smith's work, by no means stops at the United States border. He is fully engaged in UC San Diego's efforts to fortify testing, treatment and prevention protocols in other countries, having established labs in both Mozambique and Romania. His travels find him leading research teams with a healthy blend of scientific rigor, passion and levity.

Dr. Sanjay Mehta, Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases at UC San Diego has traveled with Dr. Smith, and says, "Davey has projects ongoing on five continents, all of which are shaping the way we understand how HIV causes disease, and how best to manage it in different social and economic situations. It's not a stretch to bet that he will be working in Australia soon, although Antarctica may be a longshot. I'm lucky to have had the opportunity to work with him on several of those projects, and I have learned much about how sociopolitical differences affect the way HIV is managed around the world. One other thing that I have learned is that if this HIV stuff gets boring for him, he'll do great as the next host of "Bizarre Foods" on the Travel Channel, as he's willing to test his palate all over the world."

"Traveling Man" (from top):

Drs. Connie Benson, Davey Smith, Fred Sawe & Chip Schooley at The Obama Children's Hospital in Kenya; Marina, Davey Smith and Borges Zacarias in Mozambique; The Casa Doru Children's Hospital in Romania; Davey finds a little friend in Peru.



Dr. Smith recognizes and appreciates how UC San Diego has already shaped the way HIV is treated on a global scale. He says, “UCSD has made a considerable impact on the global HIV epidemic: identifying drug resistance and superinfection, the development of the first, second, and third generation of HIV drugs; determining crucial aspects of HIV transmission; developing research and healthcare in resource-limited settings—the list goes on. And, we continue to be leaders in the international HIV research effort from HIV prevention to cure research to vaccines. Our commitment to these efforts has never wavered.”

When Smith steps out of the lab and away from his many projects, he has the opportunity to indulge in another passion: poetry. He brings the elegance and precision of his research practices to this medium while invoking stories of life, death, and a journey through the world. Several of Smith’s poems have been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

At the end of the day, we find in Davey Smith a steadfast optimism grounded in a sense of purpose. “I think we will find a cure and vaccine,” he says. “You have to think you can—before you can.” Meanwhile, “I will use every single tool in our toolbox to prevent HIV transmission within communities. I will work with my friends and collaborators to make more tools,” because, though a cure may be on the horizon, “we should not sit around waiting for one.”

Into Africa (excerpt)

Back when the sun was closer to the ground

Before my plane descended into Africa

Back when the dawn did not signify a new day

It was the same day as the day before

and the day before that

and the day before that...

Back when there was one continent,

One word,

One Prayer,

One Music...

Davey Smith, MD

Dedicated to Dr. Leland Rickman