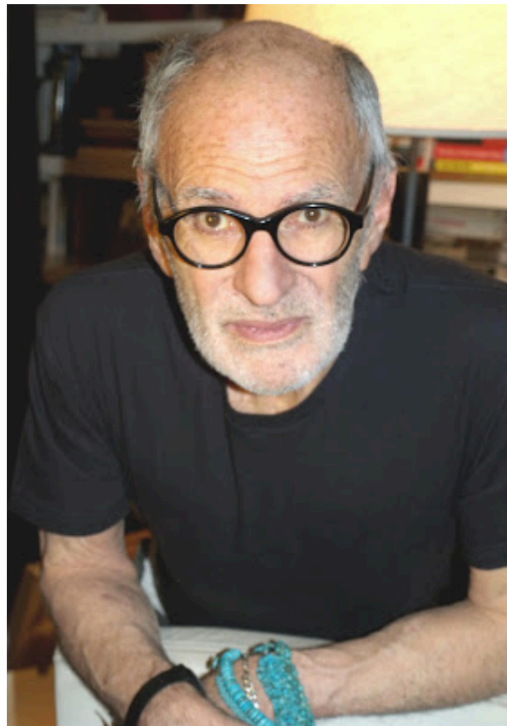


BRONX VOICE

REMEMBERING LARRY KRAMER: A LEGACY IN LGBTQ HEALTH



Larry Kramer

By Chandra Wilson, July 14, 2020

As a clinical field nurse caring for AIDS patients in the early days of the epidemic, Arthur Fitting, LGBTQ Program Director for the [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#), witnessed firsthand the fear and devastation that accompanied “the plague,” as pioneering AIDS activist, playwright and author Larry Kramer termed the then emerging HIV/AIDS crisis. Kramer’s powerful advocacy for people with AIDS during that time made an indelible impression on Fitting. For him, Mr. Kramer’s passing this year is a reminder and call-to-action for continued diligence in the fight for LGBTQ Healthcare rights.

One of the most essential lessons Fitting learned from Kramer was how to advocate for people, and what it means to truly support a cause one cares about. “It’s wonderful that I’m working at VNSNY, which advocates for all patients and plan members today as it has for 127 years. We are consistently engaging the community, asking questions, listening, caring for people in all communities, including the LGBTQ community,” Fitting explains. “These endeavors, and the efforts VNSNY is making toward connecting with older members of the LGBTQ community to inform and ensure proper access to healthcare and provide safe, comfortable care in the home, are strengthened by Kramer’s work.”

Kramer was a 1981 co-founder of GMHC (Gay Men’s Health Crisis), the first service organization for HIV-positive people, having later found ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). As an early and remaining member of ACT UP, Fitting reflects on how Kramer was able to give the HIV/AIDs community a voice. “Having lost a partner to AIDS and working as a clinical nurse in the West Village at the height of the epidemic, I will never forget how helpless, fearful, and

directionless our community was. Kramer's work helped to ignite fires within us at a time when we were all living in the dark," Fitting recalls. "I and some of my co-workers were able to help develop new programs for VNSNY, so that AIDS patients could receive quality care and, in so many instances, be able to pass on in their own homes with dignity."

Known for his outspoken, irascible nature, Kramer's relentless pursuit of equality for members of the LGBTQ community has not only helped make marriage equality a reality and reinforced the [LGBTQ Healthcare Bill of Rights](#), it has helped pave the way for special needs programs like [VNSNY CHOICE SelectHealth](#) Health Plan that are designed for Medicaid-eligible New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS and/or who identify as transgender or live in a Homeless shelter.

We have made enormous strides since the height of the AIDS epidemic and still, the need for advocacy persists. Larry Kramer reminded us that there was always more work to be done, not tomorrow, but today, and his legacy lives on in the efforts of all who continue to advocate and serve to help ensure that members of the LGBTQ community have access to the health care they need and are free to live without fear of discrimination.

"It is clear to me that, even after generations, 'fires of hope' can still roar," Arthur Fitting reminds us.

For more information about Home Health Care services from the not-for-profit Visiting Nurse Service of New York, please visit www.VNSNY.org or call 1-800-675-0391.