

Connecting with Dr. David Ho

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I never thought that I, a 12-year old girl, would have the chance to talk to a man who has been named Time Magazine's "Man of the Year", who has received such great honor, respect, and appreciation for his work and devotion to finding a cure to AIDS. He not only created a working treatment that is being used on basketball star and businessman Magic Johnson, but is continuously putting a great deal of effort into his research. This man is David Ho.

Dr. David Ho immigrated to America from Taiwan at age 12, and instantly



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plunged into a new culture, language, and customs. He graduated from high school at the top of his class, and attended Caltech and MIT. Dr. Ho later graduated at the top of his class once again, but this time from Harvard Medical School.

On Thursday, March 11, 2004 at UR Medical Research Building, Dr. Ho presented a very surprising, yet informative presentation on AIDS. One of the shocking statistics he presented that as of 2003, approximately 40 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS: this immediately caught the attention of the large audience. Dr. Ho explained how HIV/AIDS got spread around China, making China one of the most AIDS infected countries.

There was a Q&A session. I was the first to ask a question: “I want to know who or what inspired you to study AIDS.” He followed with a touching story about how his first patients arrived with an unidentified disease. He saw many young people die from this disease, but nobody knew how the disease was caused, or whether or not it could be cured. With the little known information, Dr. Ho began his research for the mysterious disease. Scientists at that time believed that the HIV virus entered an inactive stage after the person had been dsexposed to the virus. No symptoms would show for about 15 years. Dr. Ho proved that the virus doesn’t just stop and go away. Instead, it continuously multiplies in the body, weakening the immune system. The immune system cannot fight off any diseases, cancers, and viruses. His discovery lead to the conclusion that if the virus is treated shortly after detection, there is a chance that the person can completely eliminate the disease only if the person continues using the treatment. With this knowledge, Dr. Ho invented a “cocktail”, or combination of drugs. This treatment is currently being used on Magic Johnston, a NBA player on the L.A Lakers who was diagnosed with HIV 10 years ago.



One other question was asked by a man who slowly raised his hand in the back row. In a hushed, whispery voice, he told Dr. Ho that he had no questions, but wanted to thank him and all of the scientists that were

working on AIDS, for this man was suffering from AIDS for 16 years, and was also diagnosed with hemophilia. As he put the microphone down, people slowly gazed back to Dr. Ho, who never lost eye contact with the man. Dr. Ho told the man that was very grateful the man had come such a long way and deeply appreciated his presence. Gradually, applause began to unfold as both Dr. Ho and the man exchanged smiles.

It occurs to me now, even though I'm twelve years old, I have already met someone so incredible and capable of changing the world. When I asked this person who inspired him, it didn't occur to me until afterwards that this man may be the person that will inspire me in the future.