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National Notes

by David Prybylo
Q-Notes Staff

Task Force on AIDS drugs formed

WASHINGTON—HHS Secretary Donna Shalala announced on November 30 that a National Task Force on AIDS Drug Development has been formed to expedite the search for new therapies against AIDS and HIV.

The expert panel will be highly focused, says Shalala, and will seek new and innovative approaches to the development of AIDS drugs.

"The task force has a clear and critical mission: to identify, and remove, any barriers or obstacles to developing effective treatments," Shalala said.

The 15-member panel will be drawn from government, the pharmaceutical industry, academia, medicine and the AIDS-affected communities. "This represents unprecedented high-level collaboration among leaders in the field," Shalala said.

"None of us can guarantee success," she added. "HIV is a vicious and cunning adversary. But history will judge us harshly if we fail to give it our best shot."

"The FDA has made great strides in streamlining the approval process for drugs to treat life-threatening conditions, and the NIH has contributed mightily to our understanding of AIDS and HIV. In addition, the Clinton administration and Congress have raised the NIH AIDS research budget 21 percent this year, to \$1.3 billion. But the sad fact remains that not a single New Drug Application for an antiretroviral drug is currently before the FDA. No matter how much we shorten the pipeline, we cannot achieve our goal unless we start filling that pipeline with promising compounds," Shalala said.

The Task Force on AIDS Drug Development will be appointed by and report to the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Possible AIDS vaccine "on the right track"

ST. LOUIS—A potential AIDS vaccine under study at St. Louis University School of Medicine's AIDS Vaccine Evaluation Unit (AVEU) appeared to cause no major side effects in study volunteers and produced antibodies that killed a laboratory strain of HIV. Findings of the study on gp160 (Immuno AG, Vienna, Austria) appear in the December issue of the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* and represent the first published results of studies with this gp160 vaccine.

The vaccine is made using genetic engineering to create a synthetic protein that mimics one protein of HIV (gp160). When the gp160 vaccine is injected into the body, it triggers production of antibodies, stimulating the immune system into mounting a defense against HIV. Because gp160 is synthetic, it is impossible to contract HIV or AIDS from the vaccine.

"The results are encouraging," said Robert B. Belshe, M.D., professor of internal medicine, director of the division of infectious diseases and immunology, and director of the Center for Vaccine Development. "There are several significant findings. One is the vaccine's safety. Two, the vaccine induced antibodies that killed a laboratory strain of HIV. We don't know if this means that the vaccine will work against a 'real world' strain of HIV, but we're on the right track."

The study also showed that gp160 may produce an effect known as T-cell memory, so that once exposed to the vaccine, the immune system is primed to recognize and attack HIV at some time in the future. "The vaccine induced a very vigorous T-cell memory response that we hope would enable the immune system to react quickly to attack and kill the AIDS virus," said Dr. Belshe. "How long that memory lasts is something we'll be looking into in the future, but we think it's a very significant finding."

The study at St. Louis University School of Medicine's AVEU and four other universities involved 60 volunteers. Each volunteer received four injections over a one-year period. One group received a low dose of gp160, a second group received a higher dose of the vaccine, and a third group was given an injection that did not contain the vaccine. Antibodies were measured every

one to two months during the study. Researchers found that three injections of the vaccine stimulated vaccine-induced antibodies to HIV. Four shots boosted that antibody response. The best responses were seen in those in the high-dose group. Seventy-five percent of volunteers who received the highest dose developed neutralizing antibodies. Researchers will now test even higher doses of gp160 in an attempt to boost antibody production. They will also test a form of the gp160 vaccine made from a different strain of HIV, more commonly found in the United States.

Science magazine, however, in a report issued Nov. 12, has questioned the efficacy of current vaccines in trial. Although they did not mention the St. Louis study, the report says that while three other vaccine studies have shown that the vaccine candidates produce antibody response in subjects, the antibodies were not effective against "primary field isolates," or fresh virus that had been taken from AIDS patients.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, expressed concern about the findings. "It certainly does make me anxious about going forward with large-scale efficacy trials," he said.

Officials at NIAID have scheduled a meeting for next spring to evaluate the vaccine tests and to decide whether or not to go forward with vaccine tests now scheduled for the end of next year.

Funding directory published

NEW YORK—For the first time ever, a directory has been published which provides information on funders for gay, lesbian, and bisexual projects. Published by The Working Group on Funding Lesbian and Gay Issues, *Funders of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Programs: A Directory for Grantseekers* lists over 100 foundations and corporations from across the country who have supported lesbian or gay programs.

All of the organizations listed in the Directory have provided financial support to lesbian, gay and/or bisexual programs. However, the extent of support varies greatly, from exclusive funding of lesbian and gay projects, to awarding a single grant to a gay or lesbian organization. The majority of grantmakers included fund programs only in their local geographic area, however over 25% of the entries also fund programs throughout the country.

"This Directory will be a valuable resource for organizations seeking funding for lesbian, gay and bisexual programs," said Nancy Cunningham, Executive Director of the Working Group. "We plan to update and expand the Directory annually to provide a reliable, timely source of potential funders for the important work of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities."

"Although lesbians and gay men have done an admirable job in supporting their own communities over the years, the pressing needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens for services and legal protection are much greater than the resources available," said Bob Crane, Vice President, Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation and Co-Chair, Working Group. "In addition, there remains an important educational task within the philanthropic community to promote understanding of and equal rights for people regardless of their sexual orientation. The Working Group can play a significant role in this process."

The Directory is available for \$10.00. To order the Directory or for further information on the Working Group contact The Working Group on Funding Lesbian and Gay Issues, 666 Broadway, Suite 520, New York, New York 10012, (212) 475-2930, (212) 982-3321 fax.

Miller to sponsor Gay Games IV

MILWAUKEE—Miller Brewing Company will be the exclusive malt beverage sponsor of Gay Games IV & Cultural Festival, June 18-25, 1994, in New York City.

According to Greg Plowe, consumer promotions manager, "Gay Games IV is an international event, and this year more than 15,000 athletes from 40 countries are expected to participate. We're pleased to be

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