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HIV-slowing mutation discovered

by John Bowers
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—A common genetic mutation significantly delays the progression of HIV disease, scientists at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) have found.

Philip M. Murphy, MD and David H. McDermott, MD of NIAID's Laboratory of Host Defenses, led a research team that screened blood samples from HIV-infected individuals for mutations in the gene for CCR5, a key HIV co-receptor. The CCR5 gene encodes a protein on human immune cells that helps HIV enter and infect those cells. Recent studies have shown that individuals who produce mutant forms of CCR5 protein are more likely to resist HIV infection or have slower HIV disease

progression than individuals who produce normal CCR5 protein.

This time, the researchers wanted to see if mutations in the promoter, a region of the CCR5 gene that regulates the quantity, rather than quality, of CCR5 protein, might also influence HIV disease progression. Their suspicions that such mutations would slow disease progression were confirmed. The scientists discovered that individuals with promoter mutations in both of the CCR5 genes they inherited developed AIDS almost four years later, on the average, than HIV-infected individuals who lacked the mutation.

In addition to providing an important new piece to the puzzle of genetic protection against HIV disease, the finding could point to new opportunities in HIV treatment research. ▼

OutCharlotte

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their sexuality, but all are appreciated because of the other aspects of their being. This entire 'exploration' of what people are in addition to being gay was unexpected and possibly unplanned. I like to think that OutCharlotte has gained such a momentum of its own that it is now capable of layers of meaning; that the theme chosen each year is a starting point, not the solitary goal.

Tinseltown, the OutCharlotte 98 fundraising dance, was one of the more unusual and successful parts of the weekend. The location, in the old (and hopefully soon-to-be-renovated) Carolina Theatre, was superb and created an atmosphere unlike any other in Charlotte. It followed a day of workshops at the Great Aunt Stella Center (showing once again OutCharlotte's knack for picking the new trendy locations about town), which ranged in topic from 'Harassment in the School & Workplace' to 'The Truth About Queens, Crowns and Big Hair.'

The finale of the weekend was the Closing Ceremony at which the Don King Community Service Awards were presented to Diane Travis and to the founders of the Charlotte Gay

& Lesbian Film Series: Robert West, Chuck Barger, Mark Huffstetler and Tom Warshauer. A fund established to empower and develop leadership in the community was announced and named in honor of Naomi Swinton. The Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee for OutCharlotte 99 were presented: Bobby Bennett and Chris Turner (Festival dates are October 6-10, 1999). Artists-in-Residence Sara Felder and Byron S. Stewart of "A Real Read" both made heartfelt and complimentary remarks about their experience with the Festival. And then it was all over...

Well, except for the Atlanta Feminist Women's Chorus which presented a lively and...bizarre production of songs from the 1970s. Comedian Alyssa Barnett was emcee and the women proved that even dykes can be disco queens. Their performance was certainly energetic (as was that of the musical director who flamed about on stage for most of the show), which made up for any momentary lapses in technique. As is typical of lesbian ensembles, there were altos aplenty and very few sopranos, but they made the most of it. The very fact that they staged theme songs from '70s sitcoms and had choral arrangements of disco hits made up for anything. It was an upbeat ending to a successful Festival. ▼

Candidates

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had taken. "The Republicans in this county have swung so far right that it's almost embarrassing." Vance challenged everyone in attendance to call 10 people and make sure they are registered and planning to vote.

The last At-Large candidate to speak was Chris Cole, an openly-gay Libertarian, who was not on the evening's roster nor endorsed by the PAC. The meeting moderator called him out of the audience and offered him equal time.

Cole said he could not explain the PAC's decision to not endorse him since no one ever contacted him for his positions. He noted that his impetus for running was to block future attacks against gay and lesbian citizens. "I'm proud of my community — my gay community and my larger Charlotte community — and I don't ever want to see another meeting like the one I attended April 1st, when those Commissioners tried to marginalize us and push us back. I knew then that I had to do something."

After Cole finished, the moderator explained that only candidates who were "viable" were considered for endorsement, and, as a Libertarian, Cole did not meet that standard. She commented that the PAC had no official stance on his campaign.

The district candidates at the meeting were able to stump a bit less than their At-Large counterparts because the district races are mostly clear-cut. In two of the six contests, the choice is between a supportive candidate and a "Gang of Five" member and another supportive incumbent Darrel Williams is unopposed.

Margaret (Maggi) Markey is challenging homophobic Commissioner Joel Carter in District 1. She grew up in Maine and moved to Boulder, CO where she was elected to the Board of Commissioners. She said that people are taking Carter's victory for granted when it is not assured.

Norman Mitchell is seeking the District 2 seat. He told forum attendees, "People shouldn't have to put up with the things that gays and lesbians have dealt with this year."

The last candidate to speak was Everett

Passaly who is running against "Gang" member Bill James in District 6. Passaly is a Charlotte firefighter who is making his first foray into local politics. He said the Commissioners' infamous April 1 vote motivated him to get involved. Like Markey, he predicted that his race will be tighter than many have supposed.

When the speeches were finished, all eight candidates fielded questions from the audience. Each expressed support for — or a willingness to study further — issues ranging from public accommodations statutes to domestic partner benefits.

Although he did not participate in the forum, State Court of Appeals candidate Judge Ray Warren was recognized from the podium and applauded for his support.

As the meeting ended, the audience, clearly impressed by the candidates' commitment to fairness and equality, offered a rousing ovation to them all. ▼

History

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The goal for *Out of the Past* is that it will become a classroom tool for teaching gay and lesbian history as part of an accurate, inclusive curriculum. "We see this as a tremendous opportunity to open discussion in our school and to give students a more accurate sense of their history. I honestly feel that our community and educational standards will be strengthened by this effort," stated Judy Vreeland, director of Boston's Walden School.

The Greensboro screening was open to the public and it does not appear that the film will be viewed in any NC school in the foreseeable future. "A public school in North Carolina is going to have a real fight [to show *Out of the Past*]," said Gary Palmer, GLSEN-Greensboro co-chair. "Even to do a simple workshop it takes a good year, year-and-a-half to get anything through."

For more information on *Out of the Past* or details on how to bring the documentary to your community, contact Matt Lavine at (212) 727-0135 ext. 105 or e-mail mlavine@glsen.org. Additional information can also be found on the Internet at www.glsen.org. ▼

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