

AIDS groups targeted by Tommy

Activists who taunted HHS Secretary Thompson may pay price for angering government

by datalounge.com

WASHINGTON, DC — The US Department of Health and Human Services is reviewing the federal support given to more than a dozen AIDS groups whose members demonstrated against HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson in Spain last month.

The Washington Post reports HHS officials said they had launched the reviews at the request of 12 members of Congress who expressed concern that no "religious themes" were presented before delegates attending the international AIDS conference in Barcelona.

The US government was roundly criticized during the conference for not doing enough or spending enough to address the pandemic. On the third day of the weeklong conference, Thompson was loudly heckled as he attempted to deliver a speech on American AIDS policy.

Five days after the conference ended, a letter signed by 12 Republicans asked Thompson: "How many individuals — from both the government and nongovernment organizations — attended the conference with some form of

federal assistance? Please provide a complete list of these individuals and their affiliations."

Thompson's officials say they are bound to honor the congressional request, but the *Post* reports observers inside and outside the HHS say department officials are "genuinely angry" about their treatment and are seeking to prevent what they view as "disrespectful behavior" in the future.

"Groups that do advocacy and get public money are always concerned that there's an awkwardness in that situation," said Terje Anderson of the National Association of People with AIDS. "But I can't think of another time there's been talk of retaliation."

The audits follow last month's ouster of Scott Evertz as head of the Office of National AIDS Policy. Most AIDS professionals in the capital agree that Evertz was fired to placate conservatives angered by his advocacy of condom use over an abstinence-only approach to HIV prevention.

The newspaper says the level of distrust between the administration and AIDS treatment and advocacy groups has been worsening steadily. Many say the depths of animosity now directed at the conduct of the administration and its handling of domestic AIDS groups hasn't been at current lows since Ronald Reagan left office.

HIV patients opt for herbs

From herbs to acupuncture, they are looking beyond conventional help

by Randy Dotinga
Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network

New research suggests that two out of every three HIV-positive patients in the United States are turning to at least one form of alternative medicine. But it's not clear how many of the patients are keeping their doctors up to date about what they take.

The mainstream medical community is paying more attention than ever before to alternative medicine approaches, such as acupuncture. But pills from health-food stores can spell trouble in people with HIV infections, said Frank Myers, an epidemiologist at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego.

"They can cause unreliable laboratory tests, they can result in adverse drug reactions and they can interfere with the ability of certain drugs to be absorbed, all of which aren't good things," Myers said.

Dr. Mark Vosvick, a professor at the University of North Texas, and colleagues

surveyed 158 HIV-positive patients in the San Francisco area, Reuters Health reported. Half said they were taking alternative multivitamins, 24 percent used Chinese herbs or botanicals, 17 percent used mineral supplements and 7 percent took garlic.

Vosvick reported his findings at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Chicago.

Alternative medicine has been part of the AIDS landscape since the epidemic began two decades ago, but knowledge is scarce, said Gregg Gonsalves, director of treatment and prevention advocacy at Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City. "We may not know what they do, how they work or if they work at all."

In one bit of good news, reference books are giving doctors more information about how alternative medications work, so they are more prepared to give advice when a patient asks for it, Myers said.

"Patients should talk to their physicians first," he said. "That's all it is, just letting the physician know and then discussing the benefits and drawbacks."

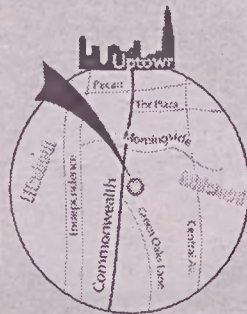
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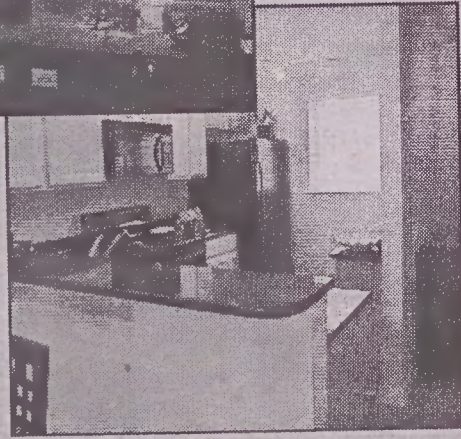
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