

News

AIDS causes concern among health care workers

By PAUL RUSS
Staff Writer

After the national Center for Disease Control (CDC) revealed in a recent report that three women health care workers had contracted AIDS from their patients, infection control practitioners were confronted with the task of keeping fellow workers from overreacting.

The three cases were the first documented cases of AIDS infections among health care workers which didn't involve direct injection of infected blood or prolonged exposure to body fluids of an infected patient.

"In the long run," said Loraine Price, Clinical Instructor in Infection Control Medicine at UNC, "the CDC report will have positive effects by causing an awareness among health care workers to comply with safety guidelines."

"As long as no one overreacts," Price said, "it will be a positive experience in the short run too." It must be made clear that these three health care workers did not contract the disease by casual contact, Price said. Also, research

still shows that AIDS cannot be contracted through casual contacts.

"Each of the three women had portals of entry for the virus," Price said. One of the workers had chapped hands and was not wearing gloves, one was splashed in the face and the virus entered possibly through her mouth or eyes, and the third worker had dermatitis on her ear, Price said. These were not instances of casual contact, she said.

In a recent interview, nurse Carolyn Crigler, the infection control practitioner at HCA's Orthopaedic Hospital of Charlotte, emphasized the importance of practicing standard health care guidelines when handling blood products. "Before the CDC's report, my past seven years of preaching was just seen as 'infection control guidelines,'" Crigler said. "Now all the guidelines have become important and real."

An important factor in all three cases, Crigler said, was that the nurses and lab technician were not following standard practices for the handling of infected blood

products.

"These guidelines were learned way back in nursing school," Crigler said. "We don't need 'extraordinary' precautions to handle AIDS patients."

"But the standard precautions need to be followed for every single patient. There are so many carriers of the virus that we don't know about."

Crigler said that since the CDC's report she had not seen any negative repercussions among health care workers at her hospital, only an increased awareness.

Its fear is unwarranted because the virus simply isn't easy to transmit, Crigler said. Fear would have increased among health care workers years ago if the virus were easily transmitted, she said.

At their educational conference in May 1987, the Association for Practitioners in Infection Control (APIC) noted that the risk to health care workers exposed to the virus is extremely small. The risk is less in magnitude than that for Hepatitis B.

The APIC conference recommended that health care workers

assume all patients are infected with AIDS virus when handling blood products or body fluids.

"Health care workers need to understand how the virus is spread," Crigler said. "They can't let their emotions overshadow the

truth of how it's spread.

"It's important to educate and talk about it. That's our best protection."

Price said, "We need to isolate the disease — not overreact and isolate the people."

Theft of computer hurts campus center

By RON CRAWFORD
University Editor

The June 1 theft of a \$4,000 computer system from UNC's International Center, the latest in a string of similar thefts, brings the total cost of campus computer equipment stolen since March to \$13,000.

But University police Sgt. Ned Comar does not think the thefts are related.

International Center Director Jill Bulthuis said the theft of the center's IBM pcXT, printer, software and instructional manuals has crippled the center.

The center's database, which contains critical information on over 200 students from 72 foreign countries who will be attending UNC this fall, was also lost in the theft. Replacing the database will be costly and lengthy, Bulthuis said.

"The problem is finding the resources to build a new database," Bulthuis said. UNC does not insure its computer equipment, she said, and reprogramming the database will take 18 months.

Bulthuis said the center is presently using computer equipment loaned from the College of Arts and Sciences and is trying to locate funds for hiring graduate students to type information back into the computer.

The equipment was apparently stolen by someone who had a key to the center's office, Bulthuis said, because there was no sign of forced entry.

Sgt. Ned Comar of the University Police said little or no force was used in most of the computer thefts.

"The problem we're having is most of the theft is coming from people who apparently have access to the equipment," Comar said. "We're trying to convince those who have computers and those who intend to get computers to secure them better."

Comar suggested that computers be bolted down with a system that requires two keys to unlock.

"There is some beautiful (two-key) equipment on the market now that is cost-effective," he said.

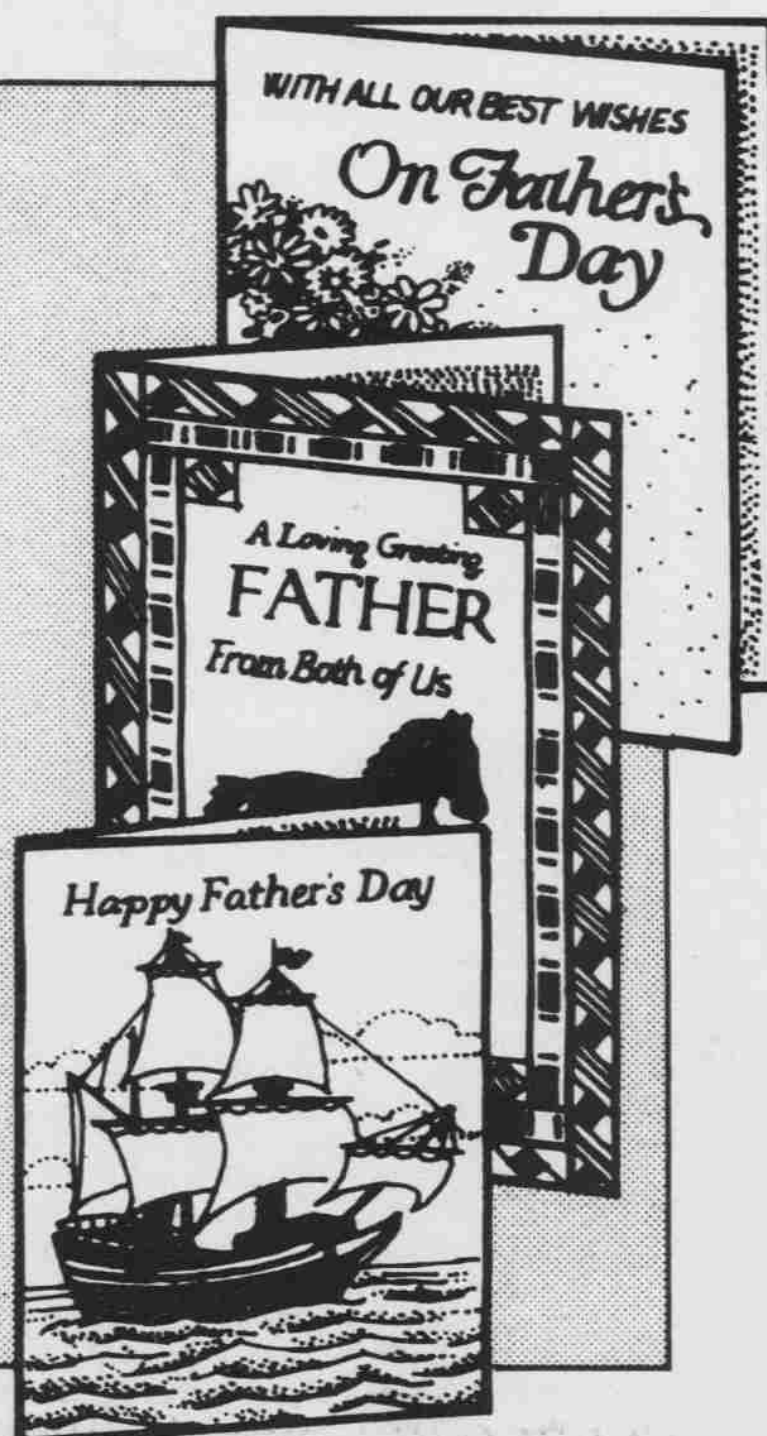
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