

AIDS Update

National Health Conference shares knowledge, exchanges ideas

by Frank M. Mondimore, M.D.
Special to Q-Notes

The thirteenth annual National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference and the ninth National AIDS/HIV Forum took place in New Orleans, July 24-28, attended by delegates from throughout the United States and the world. In over 200 meetings and workshops, gay and lesbian physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, educators and activists presented and attended symposia and workshops designed to "share knowledge and exchange ideas" on everything from new AIDS treatments to domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships to gay parenting workshops. Sponsored by the National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation and the George Washington University Medical Center, the conference also received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control for a program entitled "New Methods and Ideas in HIV Prevention."

The opening plenary session featured no less than four executive directors from national gay and lesbian organizations: Dan Bross of the AIDS Action Council, Tim McFeeley from the Human Rights Campaign Fund, Reggie Williams of the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, and Urvashi Vaid of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. In an address more reminiscent of a political rally than a health conference, Vaid characterized the Congress as "a bunch of cowards" who repeatedly cave-in to conservative lobbying groups and went on to remind the audience that President Bush has never used the words "gay" or "lesbian" in public. Repeatedly interrupted by wild applause, she closed by promising to keep working for a "thoroughly queer" future.

While the national media used the grisly discoveries of the victims of the Milwaukee serial killer to reinforce the bogus stereotype of gays as child molesters, workshops were presented on recovery counseling for gay and lesbians sexually abused as children, on "coming-out" counseling for youth, chemical dependency recovery and organizing volunteers.

Jeffrey S. Akman, M.D., Dean of the George Washington School of Medicine, introduced a day-long AIDS medical update in which highlights of the International AIDS Conference just ended in Florence, Italy, were presented. In addition to several new drugs with modes of action similar to AZT, new drugs with completely new mechanisms are being developed. Immunity to SIV, an animal

virus similar to HIV, has been successfully developed in chimps and the safety of several HIV vaccines has been demonstrated, paving the way to efficacy studies. The Jonas Salk Institute is exploring the concept of administering an HIV vaccine to persons infected with the virus but not yet showing signs of disease. Modeled after the current treatment strategy for persons infected with the rabies virus, this approach theorizes that in an infected but immunologically intact individual, an HIV vaccine would cause the body to raise immunity to, and wipe out, all HIV present in the body—basically eradicating the infection.

Dr. Gilbert Herdt, a professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago reported preliminary data from a study of gay youth which examined the "coming out" process and suggests that gay adolescents are accepting and acknowledging their sexual orientation and joining an enlarging gay culture at progressively earlier ages. He predicted that "within our lifetimes" it will be quite ordinary for the "coming out" process to occur at puberty—not, as is so common today, in late adolescence, often after years of confusion, secrecy and shame.

Dr. Richard Isay, on the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry of the Cornell University Medical Center and author of *Being Homosexual, Gay Men and Their Development*, moderated a session entitled "Homophobia: The Hate Within, The Hate Without." Speakers including Dr. Hilda Hidalgo, a professor of Public Administration and Social Work at Rutgers University, spoke to the debilitating effect internalized homophobia has on the ability of gays and lesbians to work effectively for change.

Despite increasing homophobic crime statistics and reports on substance abuse prevalence indicating significantly higher rates of addiction to alcohol and drugs of abuse than is found in the general population, optimism and self-affirmation were constantly in evidence during the five day conference. The American gay and lesbian community is clearly being served by a huge number of passionately dedicated gay health professionals—from front line staff of agencies serving the HIV-infected homeless to officials and faculty in the highest levels of major universities and private and government health agencies.

The 14th national conference will be held in Los Angeles next summer.

Dr. Mondimore is a staff member of the Carolinas Medical Center.

Eight groups to benefit from evening of gay/lesbian entertainment

The net proceeds of *Our Family Celebration*, an evening of entertainment by the gay and lesbian community, will benefit eight groups in the Charlotte area. The production, part of the PFLAG Convention's weekend festivities, will be held on Saturday, October 12 at 8:30 pm at Dana Auditorium on the Queens College Campus.

According to Dan Kirsch and Tonda Taylor, co-producers of the event, all eight groups who applied for monies will receive funds after the event is complete. Dollar amounts will be decided after the event. Groups who will benefit are: The Brothers Foundation, to provide housing at the Carmel House and the Taylor Home to persons living with AIDS; First Tuesday Association for Gay and Lesbian Equality, for a phone line to document incidents of violence and harassment; Metro-Lina Community Service Project (MCSP), to help the Switchboard purchase additional computer software; and the Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte (MCC), to stock a Food Pantry for needy community members.

Other groups include the North Carolina Royal Court/Mecklenburg County, to provide financial assistance to individuals experiencing hardship; ONE VOICE, to sing in the GALA (Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses) Festival in Denver in July 1992; Q-Notes, to increase distribution of monthly

newspaper to additional communities in the Carolinas; and Time Out, to purchase gay-affirming educational materials for gay/lesbian/bisexual youth support group.

The evening's entertainers will include members of the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra; the Capital Cowboys from Raleigh in their first Charlotte appearance; the new dance troupe The Choreographer's Boyfriend; J. Breat Roland & Samis Rose; and many other community actors, singers, dancers and musicians.

Tickets for the event are \$10-\$20 on a sliding scale (patron tickets: \$40, \$70 and \$100), and the ticket order form includes a place for the purchaser to indicate which group(s) they want their donation to go to. Tickets are available from Metro, Bloomingdeal's or by mail from O.F.C./PFLAG, 5815 Charing Place, Charlotte NC 28211. All checks should be made to PFLAG, allowing all donations to be tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

In addition to Kirsch and Taylor, other O.F.C. Steering Committee Members are Darryl Logsdon, Leah Solomon and Liz Tumas. Contact Kirsch (704/536-1372) or Taylor (704/377-3399) for a ticket brochure or to sign up to be a singer or dancer in the community chorus/Broadway group. Rehearsals begin on Sunday, September 8. Other persons are needed for technical crews.

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