

Survey reveals gay health concerns

by Bob Josefsberg
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—A health survey conducted at the Millennium March on Washington revealed that depression and mental health are among the most serious health concerns for gay men and lesbians.

Depression and mental health topped a list of health concerns that included, among other things, HIV/AIDS, drug use, heart disease, aging and eating disorders. In fact, the issue of depression and mental health was the number one concern for lesbians and the number one concern for gay men after HIV/AIDS.

"Depression and mental health are serious issues for the gay and lesbian community," said Stephen Goldstone, MD, FACS (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons), practicing surgeon and founder of GayHealth.com. "This survey helps shed light on a problem that has long existed, but has received little attention."

Almost 75 percent of the respondents to the survey believe that depression is more common among gay men and lesbians than in the general population. Goldstone noted that it's no surprise that gay men and lesbians identified depression and mental health as a major concern, given the daily challenges that they face. Living openly or closeted each brings its own pressures that can affect a person's health and depression can stem from a sense of isolation that so many feel, he said.

The problem of depression may also be heightened or caused by an individual's behavior, added Goldstone. For example, the degree to which someone uses illegal drugs or consumes alcohol can affect his or her mental health. Interestingly, these issues also ranked high as health concerns among gay and lesbian respondents.

A significant finding from the survey was the common use of "party drugs" among gay male respondents. Nearly 40 percent of gay men surveyed at the Millennium March said that "party drugs," such as cocaine, special K, crystal, ecstasy and GHB, are used at least once a month or more among their close circle of friends. But an almost equal number, more than 38 percent, said that "party drugs" are never used among their close circle of friends.

Also significant was the finding that lesbians ranked alcohol abuse as their second highest health concern for the community after de-

pression and mental health. More than 30 percent of gay men reported the same concern.

"What we are seeing is the mental and behavioral health are among the most pressing concerns for gay men and lesbians," said Goldstone. "Medical professionals need to recognize that these issues should be an integral part of any patient evaluation and they should treat patients accordingly. Gay and lesbian health is more than just sexual practices."

Other findings of the survey include:

- More than 70 percent of lesbians and more than 60 percent of gay men have sought or are actively considering mental health counseling.

- When asked where GLBT health organizations should focus their attention in the future, respondents identified depression as their number one choice after HIV/AIDS.

- Seventy-five percent of those surveyed believe that drug, alcohol and tobacco addiction is greater in the gay community than in the general public.

- Almost 90 percent of gay men believe that "party drugs" are a threat to the health of the community.

- Almost 40 percent of gay men surveyed said that a partner has pressured them to have unprotected or unsafe sex.

- Nearly one in four respondents reported having been struck or hit by a boyfriend or girlfriend. (In many instances, gay and lesbian victims of domestic violence receive fewer protections than heterosexuals under various state laws and have fewer support services available to them, according to the American Bar Association.) The fear of being "outed," or perceived law enforcement bias may also limit reporting.

- More than 83 percent of gay men and lesbians surveyed feel it is important or very important to have a gay or gay-friendly physician.

- The vast majority of gay men and lesbians who completed the survey were out to family and close friends — 97 percent and 86.3 percent, respectively. And more than 72 percent reported that their doctor knows they are gay.

"In light of the findings on depression and mental health, it's very encouraging to see such a large number of people living openly and honestly," Goldstone. "Events such as the Millennium March and gay pride celebrations can play a crucial role in the development of a positive self-image. Gay men and lesbians need to know that they are not alone." ▼

Log Cabin members endorse Bush

by Anabel Evora
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—Gay rights organizations and activists are questioning the reasoning behind the Log Cabin Republican's surprising endorsement of George W. Bush despite his overwhelmingly anti-gay record as governor of Texas and statements as the GOP presidential nominee.

"As a nonpartisan organization, HRC [Human Rights Campaign] endorses candidates from both major parties with the clear understanding that they support our issues," said HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "The Log Cabin endorsement is perplexing because the group is throwing its support behind a candidate who opposes gay and lesbian equality and continues to succumb to the far right. For gay and lesbian Americans, there is no clear rationale or coherent reason to support Bush's candidacy."

In 39 states, it is still legal to fire people because of their sexual orientation. There is a bill in Congress to stop this injustice. But Bush has not indicated his support and referred to non-discrimination laws as "special treatment of people."

The grisly murder of James Byrd Jr. in Bush's home state of Texas, shocked the nation. Despite pleas by the Byrd family, Bush helped defeat a hate crime bill in Texas, primarily because it provided coverage based on sexual orientation, and he has not expressed support for the hate crime bill that passed the Senate earlier this summer.

Again in Texas, Bush supported a law that would have banned gay people from adopting. Based on his comments, he would rather see children languish in foster care than find loving, secure homes with gay or lesbian parents: "I am against gay adoption. I believe children ought to be adopted in families with a woman and a man who are married."

On the issue of AIDS, Bush has pushed abstinence-only education as the way to stop the spread of HIV. He also opposes needle exchange programs that have shown to be effective in reducing the transmission of this epidemic.

"The Log Cabin Republicans must have had to look extraordinarily hard to see a silver lining in what is unquestionably a dark cloud of a record," said HRC Political Director Winnie Stachelberg. "It is admirable that they tried and continue to try to make sincere inroads into the Bush campaign, but those efforts have not resulted in a single affirmative policy position in support of gay and lesbian Americans."

While his actions have been decidedly anti-gay, his inaction has been equally disturbing. While an earlier draft of the GOP platform deleted some of the anti-gay language, all of it was restored. Bush did nothing to publicly call for the removal of the anti-gay rhetoric and policy statements from the GOP platform.

Daniel McGlinchey, political director of National Stonewall Democrats, was predictably more blunt, accusing the Log Cabin Republicans of supporting "a Republican presidential candidate whose only concrete promise so far is to not call us names."

A prime threat from a Bush White House would be almost certain new appointments to the US Supreme Court. He says Justice Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas are the justices he most admires. This is a solid indication that any Justice that Bush appoints to the Supreme Court would be hostile to gay and lesbian equality. If Bush is elected, it could further tip the balance of the court and set back decades of civil rights advances, including a woman's right to choose.

"The verdict is in. A Bush/Cheney administration has the potential to be very harmful for gays and lesbians," said Stachelberg. "There is not a single reason why a gay or lesbian person should vote for Bush." ▼



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