

Defining AIDS Once Again

With all the publicity AIDS has gotten in the straight press recently, it becomes apparent how rampant the misconceptions about the disease are, among both heterosexual and homosexuals. Hence, we think that it is important and pertinent for us to make clear exactly what AIDS is, what the symptoms are, some precautionary measures you can take, and what to do if you suspect that you or someone you know has the disease.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a breakdown of the immune system, the body's natural defense system against disease. This breakdown caused by the AIDS virus leaves the victim vulnerable to common bacteria and viruses that are usually harmless to a person equipped with a fully functioning immune system. The most common infections found in AIDS victims are pneumocystis carinii, a rare pneumonia form, and Kaposi's sarcoma, a lethal skin cancer.

The so-called high risk groups for AIDS are gay and bi-sexual men with many different sexual partners, hemophiliacs, and intravenous drug users. But the disease is not confined to these groups alone. AIDS is known to be transmittable through the exchange of bodily fluids or wastes, especially during sexual contact, and through blood transfusions or shared intravenous needles. The mortality rate of AIDS victims is extremely high, up to 75% within three or four years after diagnosis. Diagnosis of AIDS presents difficulty since the incubation period can be up to three years and many of the symptoms are indicative of other illnesses. Few physicians are familiar enough with the disease to recognize it quickly, but some of the symptoms include:

- fever or night sweats
- swollen lymph nodes in armpits, groin, and neck
- shortness of breath (even at rest), with a dry cough (not associated with smoking, colds, or flu)
- unexplained weight loss of more than 10 pounds over a two-month (or less) period
- extreme, unexplainable fatigue for more than a week
- purplish spots or bumps on the skin
- persistent diarrhea

If any or all of these symptoms persist, contact your physician for a check up, but remember to not panic; these symptoms cover a wide variety of other, usually curable, illnesses.

No cure has been discovered for AIDS, though research funding and public concern are rapidly increasing. Presently all that can be done for people with AIDS is to treat the symptoms and other diseases and to hope for the best.

The old adage of "an ounce of prevention..." holds true for this crisis health situation. Advisable prevention measures include use of condoms, refraining from releasing semen in your partner's mouth or anus, and being very selective in choosing your sexual partner.

North Carolina has been fortunate in having few cases of reported AIDS, but you may, unfortunately, some day find you have a friend, or even a lover, with the disease. Remember that he or she will need your continued love and support. AIDS is not transmittable through casual contact, so you've nothing to fear in that respect, but whether or not you continue a possible sexual relationship deserves serious consideration.

If you have further questions on AIDS, the CGLA office has a variety of free pamphlets with information on AIDS and its symptoms as well as a listing of N.C. doctors experienced in its diagnosis and treatment.

-Don Suggs

Coming Out in the Residence Halls

For students living in residence halls at Carolina, "coming out" can be a difficult process. There are feelings of isolation and anxiety: Who can I turn to when I need to talk? Well, not to worry, there is a support system for gays in the residence halls.

Your Resident Assistant (RA) is an upperclassman who is there to be a friend, counselor, regulator and resource to the residents on her/his floor. RAs are trained listeners. They can be very supportive, and they understand the need for confidentiality. However, it would be very naive of me to say that all RAs are comfortable discussing gay issues. It is up to you to "feel them out" first.

Your Area Director (AD) is a full-time professional with a master's degree in student personnel or a counseling-related field. Therefore, he or she can serve as an excellent support person for you. Aside from this educational preparation, your AD has worked in numerous university settings and has extensive practical experience working with students.

Sometimes students dealing with sexual orientation issues do not realize the resources that are available to them. It is important for you to "seek out" a "friendly ear." It could help ease some of the anxieties that you have.

-Vernon A. Wall
Area Director
Hinton James dorm