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Dr. James Atkins addresses the crowd while other panelists wait their turn (l to r): Eleanor Lucas (hidden), Michael, and standing, Dr. Edmond Hogan.
PHOTO: TAMARA HAM

AIDS seminar attracts over 400

by TAMARA HAM and
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On Wednesday, January 22, 1992, more than 400 students, faculty, and concerned citizens were present at an AIDS Seminar held in Wayne Community College's North Campus Lecture Hall.

The program, planned by Dr. Edmond Hogan, chair of the Human Services department, featured 3 guest speakers: Dr. James Atkins, local oncologist (specialist in cancer); Eleanor Lucas, whose husband died from AIDS; and Michael, an AIDS victim (whose surname will not be revealed to preserve his privacy).

According to Dr. Atkins, Wayne County has 50 cases of full blown AIDS.

He discussed the ways that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) enters the body: by means of semen, vaginal fluid, and blood.

Dr. Atkins also discussed the 3 stages the virus goes through after the HIV enters the body: asymptomatic HIV infection, symptomatic HIV infection, and AIDS.

In the asymptomatic stage, people do not experience symptoms; the only sign of infection may be a positive blood test for antibodies to the virus.

With symptomatic HIV people begin to show mild symptoms like weight loss, diarrhea, fever, cough, and night sweats.

Full blown AIDS victims may exhibit all

of the symptoms already stated as well as Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare cancer, and Pneumocystis carinii, an uncommon lung infection.

Dr. Atkins cited precautions people should take to avoid this deadly disease: limit number of sexual partners, use a condom, and do not share IV needles and syringes.

Eleanor Lucas, the second spokesperson at the seminar and a former WCC student, told about the effects upon her family and herself when she lost her husband to the fatal disease.

Lucas also discussed the love and support that she and her family received during the time of her husband's death.

When she was first told by her husband that he had AIDS, she said she and her children took the news very hard.

She said each family member has to come to terms with the illness in his or her own way.

Lucas said she was grateful for family and friends who were helpful and understanding during their time of sickness and loss.

Michael, the third guest to speak at the seminar, discussed the circumstances surrounding his diagnosis with AIDS in the mid-1980s.

He became aware he had the virus when he volunteered to participate in a study focusing on homosexual males.

However, the doctor who conducted the study did not inform Michael of his illness immediately.

Michael told the audience that the doctor said, "If you ever want to know if you have AIDS, just let me know."

The doctor later confirmed that Michael was indeed HIV positive.

Michael said that he was not totally surprised to hear he had contracted the terminal disease.

In addition, he discussed the medical expenses which he has accumulated, the support he received from his family and friends, and the toll that the virus has had on his body.

Medical expenses play a major role in Michael's life though he said his insurance has been a big help even if the insurance company is not covering the full amount of expenses.

In addition, co-workers have taken up collections for his medical expenses.

After the speakers' presentations, the audience submitted questions on note cards.

Two of the questions asked were, "Can you catch AIDS through oral sex?", and "Can you catch AIDS from giving blood?"

Dr. Atkins responded that there have been cases of the AIDS virus being spread through oral sex.

Dr. Atkins said, "Catching the virus through giving blood is virtually impossible, and there have been no such cases found here in the United States."

WCC students who have questions about the disease can call the National AIDS Hotline toll-free at the Research Triangle Park, 1-800-342-AIDS or 1-800-344-7432 (Spanish). The hearing impaired should call 1-800-243-7889.