

## Health Care Focus

## AIDS and Health Care Workers: Mandatory Testing?

by Tarsha Garland

A young woman with a deteriorated body and death-filled eyes in a gaunt face was wheeled into a silent room. Some people moved away as if to avoid her so that if she sneezed they would not catch what she has. Her weak voice quivered as she spoke. The people were well aware that the young woman was very ill, so they overlooked the fact that she was not a very eloquent speaker. But what the woman had to say brought tears to some people's eyes and moans of pity from others.

This woman is twenty-three year old Kimberly Bergalis, the Florida woman is contracted AIDS two years ago from her dentist. She had never been sexually active; she wasn't an intravenous drug user, and she wasn't a hemophiliac. In fact, given her lifestyle, she should have been at low risk of contracting AIDS.

Kimberly, a few months ago, pleaded with Congress to pass the Bergalis Bill. The purpose of the Bergalis Bill is to mandate that health care workers take AIDS tests, and in turn a health care worker has the opportunity not to work on a patient if the patient refuses to take an AIDS test. I do not think that the Bergalis Bill should be passed because the government should not make regulations for a disease. If the government regulates AIDS, then cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and many other such regulations will soon follow. I do not want our government to succumb to every diseased body that rolls in front of them. Although human emotions move our legislators to do many things, this is one circumstance where long range effects will have to be considered.

Kimberly Bergalis and many others are pushing for the government to make a legislative policy requiring doctors to take a mandatory AIDS test and the patients to do the same. This may seem like a good bill now, but what will this bill lead to?

The American Medical Association suggest that passing the Bergalis Bill will only cause further prejudice against AIDS victims and further tie up

our court system. The AMA firmly believes that no one should be punished for such a deadly. AMA is of the opinion that "moral responsibility" is the only way to ensure that AIDS is not transmitted in the doctor/patient relationship.

When a doctor has found that he has tested HIV positive, he needs to inform his patients, and in turn, if a patient is HIV positive, he needs to tell the health care workers so that necessary precautions are taken into effect. If the Bergalis Bill is passed, one could be denied treatment in a medical emergency situation by a doctor who does not know whether or not you have AIDS.

During the first six months, when a person is carrying the AIDS virus, no AIDS test can detect the virus, for the test is based upon the amount of antigen in the body and not recognition of the virus. In addition to the inaccuracy of these tests, the result of a false positive test could destroy a person's career and life. The money needed to put the Bergalis Bill into effect should be spent on education the population about the transmission and preventions of AIDS, not on testing. Preventing innocent people from getting AIDS will not start with threats to punish people, but with changes in their attitudes. IF the Bergalis Bill is passed, a doctor can sue his patient who gives him AIDS. The cost of this fiasco would be millions. Other alternatives must be used in order to avoid unnecessary suing.

Everyone has a chance of getting AIDS. Just answer some of the questions below and if you answer "yes" to any of these question, you are at a higher risk of contracting AIDS than you thought:

1. Are you sexually active heterosexual?
2. If you are sexually active, have you had more than one partner, or a partner who has had previous partners?
3. Are you or have you used drugs

requiring the use of hypodermic needles? Have you had a partner that used drugs or was involved with someone who did? If you use needles, did you share the needles, did you share the needles you used?

4. Do you not use condoms during intercourse?

5. A homosexual male that does not use condoms during intercourse?

AIDS is real! It doesn't just happen to homosexual males. In spite of Jesse Helms' insisting that AIDS is a homosexual infliction, it is time that he and others listen to researchers and physicians who work with AIDS patients, so that we, the public, stop making these people suffer even more by throwing them out of the human race.

In *Newsweek*, Kimberly Bergalis stated that she is angry because people have treated her as if she was a plague to society. She and other AIDS victims are human, same as you and I. We all fear AIDS, but the only way to eliminate fear is education—not by creating even more fear with a law. This is one circumstance where a law will not solve the problem.

## Poet Reads to Colton English Club

by Amity Brown

An East Carolina University English professor read from his poetry and short stories at a poetry reading sponsored by the Colton English Club Tuesday, October 22.

Peter Makuck began the reading with "Persistence," a short story about the role cats have subtly played in his life, and followed with several poems, including "Binoculars," "Working Construction," and "Equations."

Makuck has taken his writings from such topics as his varied life experiences, his parents, a summer job, and living in France.

Additionally, Makuck offered some advice to beginning writers, saying "Write about objects. Objects are saturate in emotions."

Betty Adcock, writer-in-residence, introduced Makuck, saying he had taught in France and had given readings at The Folger Shakespeare Library and The Smithsonian Institution.

## SGA Displaying White Crosses for Alcohol Awareness Week

Yes, Halloween came and went over a week ago. Why, then, is the Student Government Association re-creating a cemetery in the middle of Meredith's front drive? The white crosses that will line the circle near the gatehouse represent the 602 lives lost last year in North Carolina to alcohol-related automobile accidents. SGA will put the crosses up on Friday, November 8, where they will remain until Saturday, November 16, following MEA's White Iris Ball. Along with this display, "Taps" will be played on the carillon bells on Friday, November 15, during the 10 o'clock hour, by Meredith senior, Amy Brock.

SGA's purpose in this, as well as all Alcohol Awareness Week activities, is to increase awareness among the Meredith community concerning the dangerous effects of alcohol abuse. Hopefully, this display will provide a though-provoking reminder on the dangers of drinking and driving.