

The FRONT PAGE

COTI
F936

June 6, 2003

Serving the Carolinas' Gay & Lesbian Communities Since 1979

Volume 24, Number 12

Identifying HIV Close to the Point of Infection

By Bob Roehr
Contributing Writer

Very early identification of new HIV infections can reduce further transmission of the virus and offer a unique opportunity to intervene to protect immune function.

The initial report on a pilot project in this area was published in *JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association*, on May 28.

Primary HIV infection (PHI) is that brief window of perhaps eight weeks, from exposure to the development of antibodies, when viral load is sky high, generally into the millions.

Many experts have come to believe that at least half of all new transmissions are passed on during this window.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services initiated a Screening and Tracing Active Transmission (STAT) program last November to identify these new infections.

Over the first six months it caught 17 people who were negative for the standard antibody screening for HIV but positive for the actual RNA of the virus. Four of them developed flu-like symptoms of acute HIV infection after their blood was drawn for the test, indicating that they had become infected only days earlier.

In an interview in Raleigh prior to publication of the article — during the Gay Men's Health Summit — STAT cochairs Christopher Pilcher and Peter Leone, both doctors and professors of medicine at the University of North Carolina, discussed the program at length.

"If we can identify some of [the newly infected] early on, there definitely are some health benefits," Leone said, pointing to the work of Harvard researcher Bruce Walker that showed how very early intervention can pre-

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GenderPAC Unites Theory and Lobbying for Equality

By Bob Roehr
Contributing Writer

The 3rd National Conference on Gender, drew more than 1400 people to Washington, DC on May 17-19 for a lively mix of academic and practical discussion, and congressional lobbying. The number of attendees was "up dramatically from last year," said Riki Wilchins, executive director of GenderPAC, which organized the event.

American society is "at a juncture where people are ready to start considering gender as a civil rights issue," she said. "They are no longer seeing it as this fringe thing but something that impacts almost everyone. Gender stereotyping is something that everyone is familiar with."

"I talk to PTA moms in Georgia who recognize it's a problem for a six-year-old son who likes books instead of girls. If we can get those people talking to gay people, talking to trans people, talking to teens of color, I think that is a really powerful coalition to put this issue on the map."

Congressional lobby days followed the weekend conference. The visits this year focused on urging Members to sign a diversity statement based on individual gender identity expression or sexual orientation in their own employment practices. It is a joint effort with the Human Rights Campaign.

"We think that is really critical if we



Riki Wilchins, Judith Butler, Ellie Smeal at GenderPAC conference May 17

Photo by Bob Roehr

are going to start to look at gender language in bills like ENDA [Employment Non-Discrimination Act] or the hate crimes bill," said Wilchins.

"And violence against teens is a huge problem. We've been tracking them, and five of eight are against teens of color" who are poor. "Clearly there is an intersection between race, and class,

and age, and gender that puts people at special risk. I don't see this really being discussed."

Kids are coming out and transitioning at an earlier age. "Gender is a subtext in a lot of things that are going on in teen-on-teen violence." GenderPAC is starting chapters on a dozen different

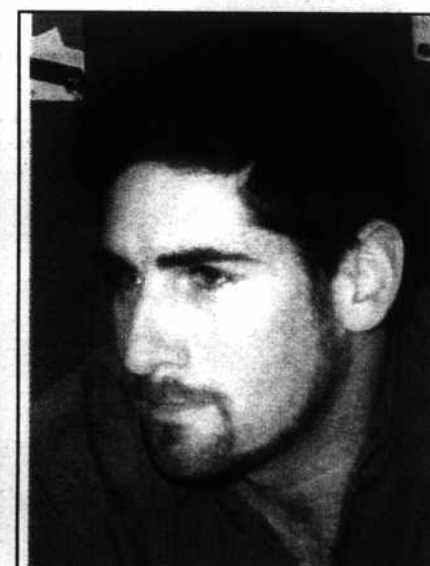
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