

Editorial

AIDS test will fuel panic, discriminate

The United States may soon have its own class of lepers or "untouchables."

A Pentagon official announced Friday that in addition to testing military recruits for AIDS, the Defense Department will screen all 2.1 million military personnel for exposure to the virus.

Military personnel determined to have the disease will be given medical treatment, counseling and a discharge under honorable conditions. This procedure is acceptable. AIDS is incurable and at present someone with AIDS can be expected to become progressively ill and die.

But those who test positive for AIDS antibodies in their blood but show no symptoms of the virus, will also be singled out for special treatment by the military. Those simply carrying the antibodies will be monitored under a medical program, and will have limited assignments to be determined by the armed forces.

A person exposed to the AIDS virus may develop antibodies, but it is estimated that only 5 percent to 20 percent will ever actually contract the disease. Therefore, the policy will needlessly discriminate against possible thousands of military employees who carry the antibody but will probably never develop the disorder.

It appears that officials are concerned with either transmission of the disease through casual contact or with ferreting homosexuals, the primary carriers of the virus, out of the armed forces. Officials claim the procedure is necessary in case military personnel need to donate blood on short notice in a terrorist or combat situation, or if they have to be deployed to another country, in which case the military would have to risk a soldier becoming ill while on an important mission.

But these reasons hardly justify testing all 2.1 million personnel for AIDS, and completely fail to justify the special treatment of those who simply carry the antibody. For terrorist or combat activity, why aren't efforts focused on increasing the blood supply where these situations are likely to occur, or testing those particularly at risk to be involved in such situations? And as Jeff Levi, the political director of the National Gay Task Force, asked, why not test just those going overseas? The expense of these efforts wouldn't compare to that of testing every employee.

The military insists that the new policy is not an attempt to isolate homosexuals, who are barred from serving in the armed forces. But because the Defense Department adopted the policy against the recommendations of its own medical advisory board, which concluded that the policy could not be justified on the basis of medical considerations, their intentions remain suspicious.

Even if this is not the military's primary intention, records will have to be kept in order to monitor the health and assignments of people carrying AIDS antibodies. Who will be able to conclusively prove that the military will not abuse the information to discriminate against personnel in innumerable, unseen ways, in addition to limiting their capacity up front? Also, these same people may face discrimination in the public sector if their records become available outside the military.

In addition, even though no evidence exists to suggest that the virus can be transmitted through casual contact, many people are not convinced. Due to the credibility associated with the military, which is the nation's largest employer, the policy could add to the panic and hysteria already associated with the disease. If the military deems that AIDS victims, and those exposed to the virus, pose a health risk to others simply through casual contact, many more Americans are apt to agree.

Also, the policy could pave the way for other agencies and businesses to rationalize testing for antibodies before hiring, promoting or insuring AIDS victims or antibody carriers. AIDS victims and even those who may never develop the disease may find themselves the subjects of wide-scale discrimination.

The policy will not become official until the exact procedure for those who just carry the antibody is determined, and until Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger gives his final approval. We sincerely hope that the procedure is reconsidered.



Letters

It's not funny

It is unfortunate that the distribution of comic strips has become dominated by a few monolithic organizations solely interested in preserving and increasing their wealth and influence at the expense of the artists and readers who were originally responsible for the existence of these organizations. The concept of the syndicate has reached the point where it ultimately serves no one's real interests.

Richard Wright
Eugene

Manipulators

This letter is in regards to the commentary (ODE, Oct. 14) on animal experimentation by Professor Marrocco.

I will not question his point that animal experimentation is necessary for the advance of science but rather will focus on what it means to have a science in which it is necessary to violate the rights of animals or other living beings in order to progress its cause.

Does such a science truly reveal the workings of nature or does it merely reveal the workings of a particularly demented human psychology which sees the human as master and power by maiming, disfiguring, and finally euthanizing non-human sentient beings as its methodology does not permit itself to be a participant/observer in life but only an

experimental manipulator whose intentions in Francis Bacon's words (one of the founders of science) are to vex or torture nature so that it reveals its secrets. Perhaps science itself is not ethically neutral, as is often maintained, or ethically positive, as is often hoped for, but is in its very methodology, ethically negative. I do not mean to suggest that rationality is out of place in life, rather there is something irrational about science itself. Limitations of space prevent me from adequately detailing the supporting evidence for my position, although given the opportunity, I would be happy to give a more complete exposition.

Clyde Davenport
Asian Studies

Distinctions

I would like to respond to the letter from Andrew Beckwith (ODE, Oct. 16). In this letter, Mr. Beckwith states that "Most Palestinian factions do not accept Arafat's authority." This is

true, however in his two earlier letters (ODE, Oct. 7,9) he uses the term Palestinian Liberation Organization. It must be made clear that the term PLO is not synonymous with the term Palestinian Liberation Faction. This is important to understand before one can even begin to understand the complex situation in the Middle East.

Mr. Beckwith also seems confused by the differences between the ROTC and the Israeli Defense Force. If he truly believes that Arabs in Israel would be eager or willing to fight in a war against other Arab countries that border Israel, maybe he could benefit from some consultation with friends of his own.

Mr. Beckwith deserves credit for his interest and attempt to keep informed of the situation, however his distorted ideas and obvious shortsightedness as to the reason and need for the State of Israel seriously impair his ability to hold a rational opinion.

Elizabeth Miller
U of O

Swaying power

Chris Green, does the word "fuck" really give you the power to sway the conservative mind?

Lewis Barger
Biology

Mike Magee
Finance/Management

John Hromco
Liberal Arts

Jay Wilber
Journalism

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