

University takes educational role with AIDS

By Gary Jimenez
and Linda Hahn
Of the Emerald

At a time when concern about AIDS is spreading across this country, the University is beginning to conduct a series of educational seminars to inform those in high-risk groups, as well as the general population, about the risks and causes of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

This response by the University mirrors a trend nationwide by schools, jails, hospitals, dental offices and other institutions to contend with the spread of the disease.

For example, the National Educational Association recently set forth a set of guidelines for dealing with AIDS victims in the schools. However, University officials have stopped short of adopting a similar set of institutional standards.

"We're not going to provide a remedy unless we're sure there's a problem," said Dan Williams, vice president for administration. "We have had preliminary discussions about it."

It is the position of both

Williams and Dr. James Jackson, director of the Student Health Center, that the University should assume an educational and informative role in dealing with the threat of AIDS.

"We're dealing with a population which has a very high level of awareness and maturity," Williams said. "I'm not sure the institution needs to play a parental role."

Jackson agreed saying AIDS is not transmitted through the kind of casual contact that takes place in the University setting.

Jackson said his main concern at the University is not with the high-risk population — primarily homosexuals. They have been counseled and are aware that the disease can be transmitted sexually, he said. They have been advised to take precautions in the private aspects of their lives, he added.

"My main concern is that all individuals should be concerned about the possibility of exposure to AIDS," he said.

Exposure through intimate contact, he said, can lead to three possibilities — 5-10 percent will come down with the full-blown disease, 20 percent

will come down with a mild form and 60-70 percent will be carriers, Jackson said. Carriers generally develop no symptoms of the disease, but can cause its spread.

Of the 14,000-plus cases nationwide, however, 90 percent fall into known high risk populations: homosexual men account for 73 percent of all cases; intravenous drug users for 17 percent; transfusion recipients of blood or blood products for 1 percent; and heterosexual men and women with multiple partners for 1 percent.

"There is a growing concern that this will become a heterosexually transmitted disease," Jackson said.

In fact, the national Centers for Disease Control has documented cases of the disease being spread through sexual intercourse. The primary way the disease is being carried into the heterosexual population, Jackson said, is by prostitutes and bisexual men.

The evidence shows that people should exercise caution in their sex lives, he said.

The problem is that the

disease can be carried in the body for up to two years, Jackson said. And 70 percent of those who contract the disease never develop any of the symptoms. Nor is it known why only 5 to 20 percent of those who do become exposed actually develop the "full-blown AIDS syndrome" that almost always results in death.

The bottom line for residents of the University, according to the American College-Health Association, is that AIDS is not believed to be spread by "casual, ordinary contact." Even families of AIDS victims are not affected by ordinary family contact with afflicted members.

According to a paper from the American Health-College Association:

•There is no reason to exclude AIDS victims or carriers from campus academic, social or cultural activities.

•Shared classrooms, study areas, libraries, theaters, etc., do not represent problems.

•There is no reason to alter dorm assignments simply because of a gay or bisexual

roommate.

•There is no current evidence that AIDS is transmitted by sneezing, coughing, shaking hands, or hugging. It cannot be obtained from toilet seats, door knobs, eating utensils, plates, glasses, clothing, books or furniture.

•The appropriate areas of concern are those of shared needles and sexual relationships with those in risk groups. Caution is not only warranted but essential.

The Student Health Center offers literature on AIDS as well as an antibody blood test to determine if a person has been exposed to the disease. Jackson will be available to groups who would like presentations on the subject.

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Shoemaker says. After several complaints, however, the station's manager took the sign down.

Shoemaker admits that he isn't sure that increased acts of prejudice against homosexuals can be entirely attributed to AIDS, however. It may be that the pendulum is just swinging back the other way and even if AIDS had never come up, discrimination might still have been on the increase, he says.

Liberal legislation that was making some headway during the 1970s is now coming under fire from right-wing conservatives. Abortion, women's rights and even arms limitations now are being scrutinized by a more conservative government. And so are gay and lesbian rights.

While the Reagan administration has never supported any sort of gay rights legislation, Shoemaker says, neither have the fundamentalist religious organizations that have influence on government just by virtue of their numbers.

Bob Powell, who also is involved with GALA, says that religious leaders, particularly fundamentalists such as Jerry Falwell, have been instructing followers to write to legislators urging opposition to HR230, a bill that would mandate gay rights.

Whether AIDS has actually brought on an increase in discrimination against homosexuals or whether it has just made opponents more vocal is unclear. But the disease has made it easier for people to attack homosexuals — physically as well as verbally, Shoemaker says.

It is becoming more common for homosexuals to be beaten up outside gay bars, Shoemaker says. While this is more com-

mon in New York and San Francisco, it also happens in Eugene at predominantly gay establishments such as Perry's On Pearl and Cassady's Tavern, he says.

Meanwhile more and more restrictions are being placed on gays because they are in a high risk group for contracting AIDS. The military has begun testing all personnel for the AIDS virus, discharging those who test positive. In New York, the state Public Health Council, asserting an AIDS emergency is at hand, ruled that authorities could close gay bathhouses. And it is now a felony in many states for homosexuals (and others in AIDS high-risk groups) to donate blood.

While there are some valid health concerns to consider, it is important to remember that AIDS is not a gay disease, says David Funk, board member of the Mid-valley Action Committee, a local organization that acts as an AIDS resource by offering counseling and educational services.

"It's not a gay issue; it's an issue of public health," Funk says.

In other areas of the world, AIDS affects males and females, heterosexuals and homosexuals indiscriminately. But in the United States, says Funk, the disease just happened to break out in the homosexual population first.

Funk is pressing for more anonymity in AIDS testing in order to make people feel more comfortable about being tested, he says.

"There's an element of paranoia with AIDS," Funk says. "It's not just that one has tested positive, but the knowledge that someone has even been tested that will have repercussions."

Funk is working with other agencies such as the Oregon AIDS Task Force and the Lane County Health Department to create an awareness of the disease among the public and health care workers because "AIDS is not a very popular disease to have."

One positive thing that has come out of the AIDS scare is that it has banded homosexuals together, says Leah Juniper, co-director of GALA.

Shoemaker admits that the crisis has, in a sense, given homosexuals a common bond. A group of lesbians in California, known as the "blood sisters" have been donating blood for AIDS victims.

Shoemaker says.

Still Shoemaker isn't sure that's good enough to outweigh the discrimination. "It can make us stronger, but we still have a big opposition."

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