

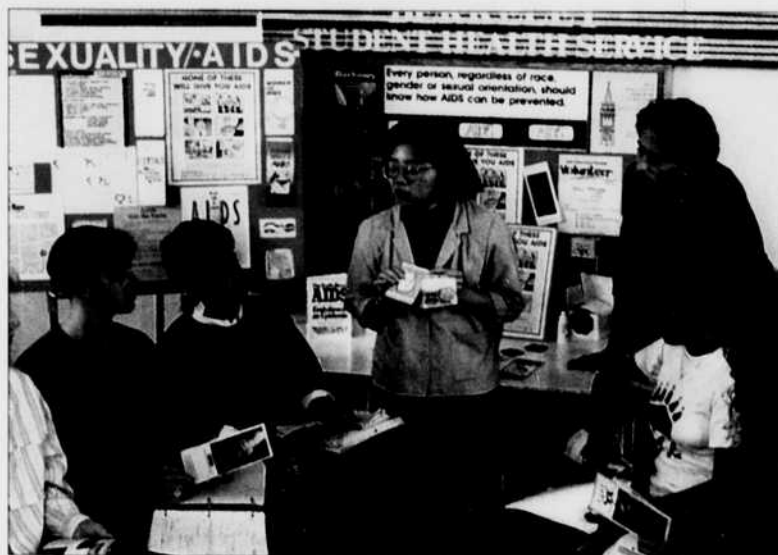
think the message that people are afraid to say is that safe sex is abstinence."

Perhaps the biggest problem for educators is getting students to take AIDS seriously. Because of their youth, most students tend to feel immortal, and they are unlikely to have seen symptoms of AIDS among their peers, since the disease has an incubation period that can be five years or more. Also, despite all the evidence that AIDS is spreading to the heterosexual population, many still view the disease as a "gay plague" that doesn't affect them. At Indiana, says Dr. Hugh Jessep of the school's AIDS task force, if a lecture or program is billed as being specifically about AIDS, students won't show up. Instead, he must disguise programs with titles like "Sex Issues in the '80s" to lure an audience.

The AIDS education effort often includes information on other, nonlethal varieties of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), which are still flourishing on campus. At many colleges syphilis and gonorrhea have decreased; genital herpes, however, has largely remained constant over the past few years, often transmitted by cold sores during oral sex. The two fastest-growing STD's among college students are chlamydia—a bacterial infection that often has no symptoms but can leave its victims sterile if it isn't treated—and venereal warts. Caused by the human papilloma virus and difficult to cure, venereal warts can occur on the external genitalia and, in women, spread to the vagina and cervix. Some types can make a woman's likelihood of developing cervical cancer thousands of times higher.

Concerted campaign: One of the most concerted STD education campaigns has been waged at New York University, whose Washington Square campus is located in the heart of Greenwich Village, where there is a large homosexual population. NYU officials are careful to emphasize that gays are by no means the only group at risk. "It's not who you are anymore, but what you do," says Bob Butler, an administrative aide in the Office of Student Life. During orientation last fall, new students were offered a host of AIDS brochures, including advice on safe sex practices; the college has also distributed a separate pamphlet called "Women Need to Know About AIDS." Last year the health service established a 24-hour AIDS hot line; half the calls to date have come from women. The school also maintains a student-faculty-staff AIDS Advisory Committee, which recently voted to install condom machines in the student center and two dorms.

Some schools have found that the most effective way to



JAMES D. WILSON / NEWSWEEK

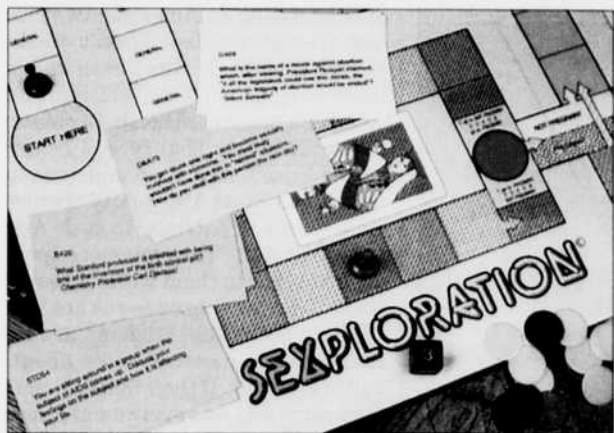
Prevention is the cure: Berkeley Health Center workshop

get students to listen to the AIDS message, and to feel comfortable dealing with the frightening facts, is to present them in an entertaining, attention-grabbing format. When Tulane health educator Tracy Moore gives her weekly lectures on sexuality and distributes condoms in dorms, fraternity and sorority houses, she also shows a film called "Condom Sense." The movie, which is also shown on other campuses, is narrated by a naked man in a shower. Student members of the Stanford AIDS Education Project recently distributed 5,300 free condoms, along with forms asking students to rate them according to color, size, shape, texture and taste. "We wanted people to realize that condoms aren't just one thing," explains senior Ken Ruebush. "We wanted people to become condom connoisseurs." Stanford also distributes "Sexploration," a board game that was developed by students to explore issues of sexuality and facts on STD's.

By now, educators see signs that their efforts are beginning to make a dent in attitudes—even at campuses where AIDS has been a topic that students prefer to ignore. Robin Sawyer, health-education director at the University of Maryland, teaches a popular course in human sexuality. He finds that students remain, to some degree, uncomfortable talking about STD's. "You can talk about your nose," he says, "and you can talk about your knees, but you can't talk about anything in between." Still, Sawyer is heartened by an enormous increase over the past year in requests from student groups for informal lectures and workshops about STD's—especially AIDS. "I'm getting swamped now," he says, estimating that he receives 20 to 30 requests each semester—including, for the first time in his five years at the school, invitations from fraternities and sororities.

The point of a college education, of course, is to acquire knowledge. Some kinds of knowledge enrich, others give students the skills they need to practice a profession. But learning about AIDS could give them something far more precious: it could save their lives.

JEAN SELIGMANN with CHRISTOPHER BROWN in New Orleans, CHRISTOPHER M. BELLITTO in New York, TODD BARRETT in Washington, D.C., and bureau reports



ART STREIBER AND LISA ROMEJEIN

'Sexploration': Stanford's informative board game