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PIZZA

AIDS cases re-emphasize guidelines

By Janet Paulson
Of the Emerald

A report published in late May by the Massachusetts Medical Society revealed that three health care workers were infected with the AIDS virus in incidents not involving needle stick exposures to infected blood.

Local health care professionals say that these unusual cases re-emphasize the need to strictly follow existing guidelines in caring for AIDS patients.

Bobbie Kalbfleisch, nurse epidemiologist at Sacred Heart General Hospital, said that two of the three cases could have been avoided by following guidelines suggested by the Center for Disease Control.

According to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report of May 22, one of the three exposures occurred when a health care worker applied pressure for 20 minutes to an artery where a catheter, a slender tube, had been removed from a patient. The nurse was not wearing gloves and later reported that her hands were chapped. It was not known at the time that the patient had AIDS.

A second exposure occurred when a blood-separating machine broke and splashed blood on a woman's hands and forearms. The woman was not wearing gloves and may have touched her inflamed ear before washing up.

The third accident could not have been anticipated, Kalbfleisch said. In that case, a vacuum-sealed test tube filled with infected blood popped open in the lab, splashing the woman in the face and in the mouth.

"But that's one out of more than 1,000 health workers who have had confirmed exposure. And that's just not contact — that's

needle sticks and on-the-job injuries of some type or other," she said.

Guidelines for caring for AIDS patients have been suggested by both the Center for Disease Control and the Health Division of Oregon's Department of Human Resources. Sacred Heart has its own guidelines, but they closely parallel those of the state and the CDC, she said.

The guidelines include the use of gloves, masks, gowns, and prescribe caution when handling sharp instruments, she said.

"The problem for health care workers is not going to be the knowns, but the unknowns," she said. "Therefore it's important to apply the general guidelines to all patients."

Based on current information of known AIDS cases and medical assumptions about the number of undiagnosed cases, Kalbfleisch estimates there is one known case to every 66 unknown cases.

"This is going to get worse and we need to have health care workers as comfortable as possible in their work setting and as protected as possible. At the same time, once the information is given, it becomes an individual's responsibility to do what we recommend," she said.

Dr. James Jackson, director of the Student Health Center, said that the MMW report has increased the awareness of health care workers in taking appropriate precautions in caring for AIDS patients.

"The risk is there — but it's minimal," he said. "The majority of health care workers look at it as an occupational hazard, but one that is manageable. And if one takes appropriate precautions, the risk is minimal."

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Bookstore more accessible to disabled

Automatic doors to aid the handicapped were installed at the University Bookstore last week.

With a push of a button, people in wheelchairs, with strollers or on crutches can open the doors and enter or exit the store on 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street.

"It's probably one of the more visible things we've done," bookstore General Manager Jim Williams said. Installation of the automatic doors marks one in a succession of renovation projects to make the store more accessible to disabled persons.

At the beginning of the school year store employees refurbished a freight elevator in the rear of the store by painting and

carpeting it. Signs describing how to operate the elevator, as well as decorative pictures, were posted.

Customers who are wheelchair-bound or who are unable to climb stairs for other reasons can use the freight elevator to get from floor to floor, Williams said.

The bookstore also recently purchased a wheelchair for any shopper who might need to use it.

With the wheelchair-bound shopper in mind, Williams said his staff has maintained wide and clutter-free aisles for many years.

The store's management team attended a seminar last month that dealt with the retailer's

responsibility of keeping a store accessible to the handicapped.

The seminar included instruction about the needs of people with hearing and visual impairments, speech impediments, mental retardation, learning disabilities and physical handicaps.

Store managers are now passing this information on to the employees, and literature on disabilities can be found in the employee lounge, Williams said.

Williams applauded the bookstore's 1986-87 board of directors, which consists of University students, faculty and classified personnel, for emphasizing the store's recent renovation.


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