

Video presents AIDS precautions

By Kathy Proffit
Emerald Contributor

While the number of hospital patients with AIDS increases, more and more medical personnel are wondering if they need to take special precautions in AIDS-related cases.

Emergency Medical Planning Inc., a non-profit company based in Eugene, has released a one-hour video tape for emergency medical professionals that explains how to work safely in situations in which they come in contact with people who have AIDS. EMP usually produces and distributes literature and programs to teach businesses and citizens about first aid.

The video, narrated by Dr. Robert McAlister, AIDS program manager for the Oregon Health Division, provides information on the history of AIDS in the U.S., showing the effects of the disease, explaining how it is transmitted and stating ways to prevent its spread.

It is designed to present information for first responders in emergency situations on how to respond and react appropriately and without fear. The tape explains the precautions that should be taken in terms of prevention, and clarifies the difference between those with AIDS, ARC and people who appear healthy but carry the AIDS virus.

Eugene health care workers believe there is an ongoing need for AIDS education for both medical personnel and the general public.

Gail Alvers is an emotional support program coordinator for Shanti, an organization that provides emotional support and care for people with AIDS, ARC and the virus. She said medical facts are the best information that people can hear and added that education is the key to

"Further education needs to be out there for people on two levels — preventative and emotional," she said. "We need to work on our own issues of prejudice to be able to deal with people here who have AIDS."

Alvers, who started as a volunteer worker with Shanti, said that many medical professionals fear coming in contact with the virus.

"But you have to think, where is this fear coming from. You have to rationalize it. It's an irrational fear; people internalize it. Not talking about it just makes it blossom and grow," she said.

Health care providers in Eugene believe the way that society receives information — through the media — ultimately affects people's changing emotions about AIDS.

Bobbi Kalbfleisch, nurse epidemiologist at Sacred Heart hospital, said education is of primary importance.

"If people aren't continually educated about the basics of the disease, when they go through lines at the supermarket and see headlines on the National Enquirer or something else, they won't know what's true, and that includes medical personnel," said Kalbfleisch, who is in charge of the in-service education at the hospital.

Sacred Heart provides in-service education on a yearly basis. Last year the main topic was AIDS.

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Ongoing seminars and lectures also are provided for people with AIDS and their families. Kalbfleisch said she believes this continuing education has certainly brought into the hospital a calmness about AIDS.

The video also describes the difference between high-risk and low-risk body fluids, giving specific suggestions to first-care providers on handling the fluids. According to McAlister, in emergency situations it's the first responders, such as police and fire department and other emergency workers, who need to know what to do and how to react.

Bill Bass, chief of Eugene's Emergency Medical Services and head of the city's ambulance division, agreed.

"By the time the patient gets to the emergency room, the situation is controlled," he said. "We've issued gloves to all police and given them goggles and face masks. And our crews are regularly gloving up before arriving at the scene of an accident."

Bass said EMS is also establishing protocol procedures and guidelines for the cleaning and maintenance of medical equipment.

Although gloves, goggles and face masks may appear intimidating, McAlister stressed that the same high standards and procedures need to be used in treating everyone, whether or not they are in a high-risk category. These are guidelines that need to be stressed repeatedly, he said.

Bass emphasized that in situations where blood and other high-risk body fluids are present, gloves and goggles are crucial for preventing contact with the AIDS virus.

Advice for caution is high, but the emotional issue concerning AIDS patients is still an important factor. Bass said that

despite the amount of hysteria in this country, his crews have given everyone the same level of respect.

Alvers emphasized the emotional issue as well.

"We need to deal humanely and rationally with people who have AIDS. They're someone's parent, or someone's child. Our fear just makes it harder for them."

Ultimately the goal of health care providers in Eugene is to treat AIDS like any other infectious disease.

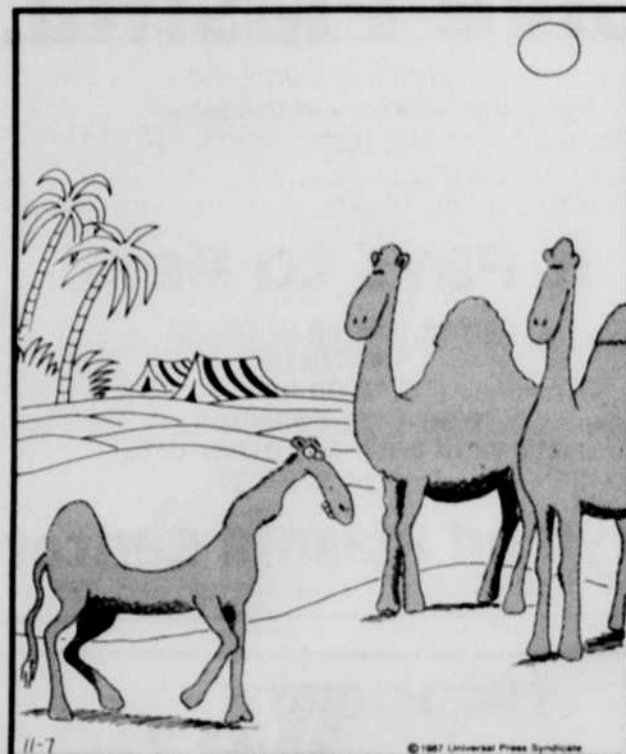
In the video, McAlister said, "It is a disease that is everybody's problem and nobody's fault." The idea of respect is something medical workers want everyone to keep in mind.

The video, "AIDS and Emergency Medical Care," is available for emergency medical professionals through the Oregon Health Division.

A new video with an informative question and answer session between McAlister and medical personnel will be released within the next two weeks.

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON

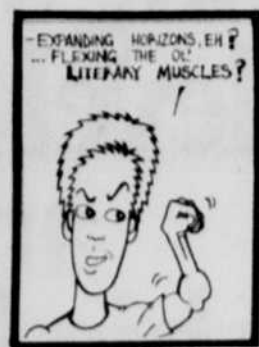


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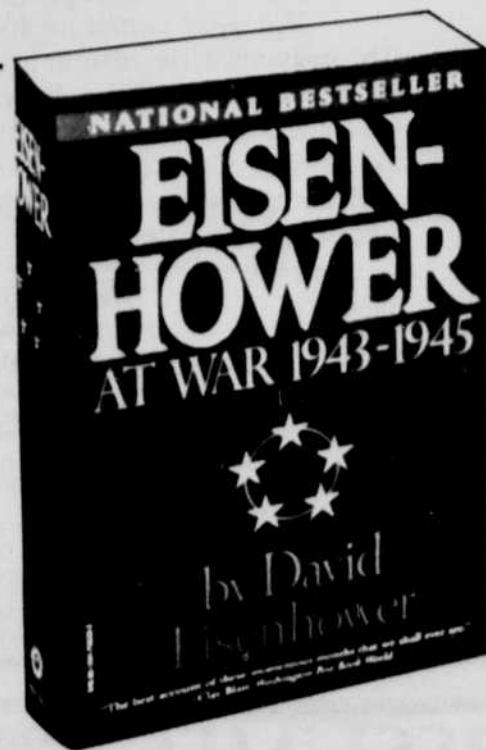
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