

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM: (541) 346-5511
ADDRESS: Oregon Daily Emerald
 P.O. BOX 3159
 Eugene, Oregon 97403
E-MAIL: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ONLINE EDITION: www.uoregon.edu/~ode

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR IN CHIEF
 Sarah Kicker
EDITORIAL EDITOR
 Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITOR
 Nicole Kreuger

Where is media attention for HIV test?

The Viagra-obsessed press have almost ignored a 10-minute test for HIV

V Viagra has really made it big. The anti-impotence pill has received extensive news coverage and obscene amounts of advertising space in nearly every medium available. Most of the attention is justified; the pill has pleased thousands of American men, and probably their partners, by creating a new-found sexual revolution.

OPINION



Jonas Allen

But isn't sex supposed to be taboo in the '90s? Based on how much we hear about sexually transmitted diseases, I sure thought so. We all know about gonorrhea and syphilis. There are television commercials about herpes, thanks to the folks at MTV. And the big two, HIV and AIDS, have become household words. So it struck me as odd that while people were taking long, hard looks at Viagra, one of the year's biggest sex-related stories got lost. Last week the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention asked medical clinics across the country to abandon current HIV tests and adopt a new, 10-minute test developed by Murex Corporation in Norcross, Ga. According to an article in the San Antonio Express-News, the SUDS HIV-1 test is the only rapid test approved by the Food and Drug Administration, although several others are waiting for approval. The motivation behind the 10-minute test was to avoid having people not show up once their results were in. Patients must wait two weeks or more for results using current tests for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. So why are only a few clinics using the rapid test? Because most of the media whacked the story for more hard news on the anti-impotence pill. Representatives at White Bird Crisis Intervention Services didn't even know about the new test. White Bird is a Eugene organization that administers free HIV tests for local residents. "I would be concerned that the 10-minute test might give people a false sense of security," said Gina Tormohlen, the administrator for White Bird's HIV testing program. She's right. Current HIV procedures test patients for infections that have occurred at least three to six

months prior to the test. Any infection that may have occurred more recently than that cannot be detected. In other words, if people used the 10-minute test after a wild weekend, their results would not tell the whole story. The new test is faster, but it can only test for infections that occurred prior to the same three- to six-month time period. Still, if people acted responsibly after their test (and we all know they would, right?), why isn't the test being used in every publicly funded clinic in America? Well, there's always the argument that the new test yields false positives, but so does the current procedure. "The test we use picks up certain proteins that resemble HIV strains, but they aren't actually HIV ... so we're used to false positives," Tormohlen said. "That's just something that comes along with the test being very sensitive. "But false positives can be retested; false negatives can be deadly," she said. Which is why this news should have gotten more coverage. HIV and AIDS are nothing to mess around with. People should be able to find out early whether they have HIV. Apparently the media don't care. Look what happened when the new

HIV test came out: It got pushed under the covers while Viagra rose to the top of the media's most wanted list. The SUDS HIV-1 test can let people know almost immediately if they have been infected with the virus that causes AIDS. According to the Express-News article, 25 percent of those who test positive for HIV never find out because they don't come back for their results. That means more than 8,000 HIV-positive people per year could finally learn their true health condition, according to CDC estimates. Tormohlen said the percentage of no-shows is much lower at White Bird. She estimated 5 to 10 percent of their test results go unclaimed, but that number may be skewed by people who lose their assigned number and have to be re-tested. "People also may not come back for the same reason they don't want to come in — they are scared to find out," she said. I don't blame them; I would be, too. But if the media don't give the 10-minute test any publicity, the spread of this epidemic could be even scarier.

Jonas Allen is a columnist for the Emerald. His work appears on alternate Wednesdays. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

Thumbs



TO THE CONSTITUTION COURT:

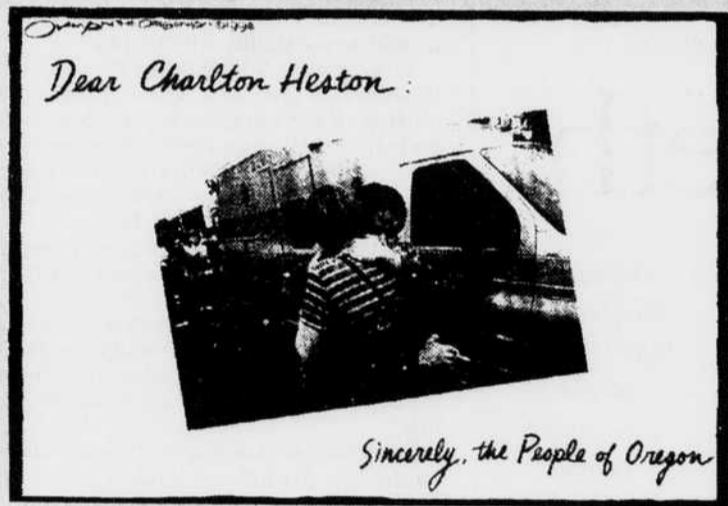
Considering the number of complaints they had to sift through, the court justices made a solid decision regarding the ASUO elections. The court acknowledged problems with the process but declined to inflict the high cost and inconvenience of another election on students; instead, it made the reasonable request that elections rules be reviewed, something we have long advocated. While it certainly wasn't flawless, the court's decision was an effective way of dealing with a difficult mess.



TO TWO-HEADED GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS DEALING WITH BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS:

Long thought extinct, the extremely rare ferret was re-discovered and made the subject of extensive federal programs designed to save endangered species. While this is admirable and recent studies showing ferret populations on the rise are welcome news, the government continues to destroy ferret populations even as it struggles to save them. As long as the government condones and helps in efforts to poison prairie dogs, the primary food source of ferrets, taxpayer money will be used to reintroduce ferrets even as it is used to destroy the ecosystem into which the creatures are being released.

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Williams is wrong

The Oregon Citizens Alliance's Barry Williams has once again graced the pages of the Emerald with his brand of the truth. He wants us to believe that he speaks for the majority of Americans. Certainly, if we believed this, it would make it easier for him to advance his views. Williams says the majority of Americans identify themselves as Christian. This is probably true, but I personally know Christians who practice the compassion, love and inclusion taught by Jesus Christ rather than buying into divisive theological arguments based on a selective interpretation of biblical passages. And, even if the majority of Americans did agree with him, which I don't believe for a moment is the case, that wouldn't make his positions right. In the not too distant past, majorities believed in slavery and the subjugation of women, and biblical passages were used to justify these views as well. As a part of the queer "community" (which is at least as diverse as the Christian "community"), Williams' views offend me. I think everyone has a right to believe what they will. Indeed, we could not stop people from thinking, nor would that be desirable. At the same time, I

think it is important to challenge bigoted and hateful views like those of the OCA when they appear. It's important to say, "Williams, you don't speak for all Americans or Christians and I believe your views are wrong."

Sean Briant
 Architecture

Quality counts

The quality of what I am taught is more important than the color of the person teaching it. I'm sure a lot of people would agree. Sure, it would be nice if there were more minority instructors here, but I think the obvious lack of minority students is a little more pressing.

Tana Charette
 EMS/Psychology

Reality for teens

I enjoyed reading about the fantasy world that Barry Williams (ODE, May 20) has constructed for himself upon consultation of surveys published in such erudite journals as Parade magazine. On Williams' planet, "nine out of 10 teens don't drink or smoke, six out of 10 don't approve of premarital sex ..." etc., and all, I imagine, are above average. On planet Earth, other studies paint a slightly

different picture of teenage life. For example, in a 1997 survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 36 percent of teenagers smoke cigarettes, 22 percent smoke cigars and 9 percent use smokeless tobacco. In an analysis published in the May 8 issue of Science, a representative nationwide sample of 1,729 young men between the ages of 15 and 19 were questioned on a variety of topics. Sixty-four percent of them acknowledged that they had vaginal, anal or oral intercourse with a female, 69 percent drank alcohol last year (19 percent did so weekly), 35 percent had sexual intercourse while drunk or high, and 12 percent had carried a gun in the last 30 days. So much for Williams' Lake Wobegon, but he is entitled to his fantasy. Williams suffers from the fact that he is a fundamentalist Christian, a religion that is not known to encourage critical thinking or a rational world view. When I learned that the little Darwin fish with feet symbols really do irritate these people, I rushed right out and bought two. Now, all I have to do is wait for that "giant Christian fish" to devour me, Toyota van and all. Yikes!

Jim Remington
 Physics