

THE AIDS GAME

by W.C. McRae

As the health crisis involving AIDS and AIDS-related conditions enters its fifth year, it has become a distressing reality that people are not only dying of AIDS; people are living from AIDS as well.

AIDS is big business. From AIDS-free ID cards and shares in condom companies, to the eye-catching headlines in *National Enquirer*, AIDS has provided the focus for a vigorous quasi-medical, quasi-scientific set of industries. Don't think that the competition between France and the U.S. to find a vaccine for AIDS is engendered by simple patriotism. The "victor" will make a great deal of money, and precisely such logic has been used to change the Reagan Administration's mind about funding research. While some insurance companies are back-peddling rapidly

from coverage of people perceived to be in high risk groups, at least one regional company is offering special "AIDS insurance." The policy, though, was characterized by one Portland insurance broker as "sham" and "a rip-off" since any good health insurance policy would provide the same coverage. The insurance broker went on to say that the insurance company in question was "making money from paranoia."

Even safe sex can be construed as a market. Ads for phone sex (there's little safer, and for only \$2!) fill page after page of the *Advocate*.

With profit mentality entering increasingly into the landscape of legitimate concerns regarding AIDS, and safety from AIDS increasingly represented as something someone sells to you, it may be too easy to transfer cynicism to local AIDS service and educa-

tional organizations. But to do so is to ignore the achievements of CAP, CHESS/PAL, and the Brinker Fund. These organizations evolved in response to demands of the growing health crisis. They were initially fueled by concerned and devoted volunteers and coordinated by administrators who made little or nothing, depending upon the level of donations.

The labor has been worth it. The three organizations represented by the Cascade AIDS Network now coordinate over 300 volunteers active in some part of the person-to-person counseling, education, companionship, and plain listening that is such a significant part of the response to the AIDS situation. Incidence of AIDS remains below projected levels in Portland, attesting to the effectiveness of the education that was offered to at-risk populations. At present, 45 PAL volunteers are providing emotional and practical support for PWAs and others impacted by the condition; PAL sponsors four ongoing support groups, and has trained 132 PALS to meet the needs of those affected by AIDS.

To acknowledge the achievements of local AIDS service organizations is also to acknowledge that these organizations have

come of age. With this maturity, the maturity that high visibility, success, and general support give, comes responsibility. CAP and CHESS fund seven staff positions to the tune of about \$9,000 a month. The money is well deserved; that is not the point. The point is simply that we are no longer talking of fledgling organizations getting by on a shoestring. These are sophisticated and effective organizations whose business is to coordinate volunteers to perform necessary tasks of education and counseling.

Funding for CAP and CHESS has recently been available from the county and state, and some money will be available from major fundraisers. We hope the time is past when concern for having the money to provide services interferes with providing those services. Not at all to make light of the gravity of the situation regarding AIDS, but often talk of "the AIDS crisis" seemed actually to refer to crises within, or between, the organizations themselves and the personalities that make them up.

As we said, CAP and CHESS have come of age. With funding more secure than it was in the past, we expect even more from them in the future.

Making a buck from AIDS

Just some of the things you might spend your AIDS dollar on:

Freshettes, from Sani-Fem, is one of the newest products in the AIDS game, a device which enables women to pee standing up, thus providing "Assurance against AIDS." A company spokesman described public toilet seats as being of "uncertain but definitely fatal infectiousness," although no evidence exists that AIDS can be contracted from toilet seats.

A clinic in Los Angeles applied for a business license to issue "AIDS-free ID Cards." Individuals applying for the card would, for a fee, be tested for HTLV-3 antibodies, and if found negative, would then be given an identity card certifying him or her as free of AIDS. Card carriers would be also provided with information about meeting other "AIDS-free" card carriers. Of course, only frequent testing — for a fee — could provide ultimate safety. LA city inspectors closed the business in January "for building code violations."

At \$8.34, *Virus Gard* promotes itself as an "anti-viral" spray that, when sprayed on public surfaces, would kill viruses, thus preventing AIDS transmission. Massachusetts Attorney General Francis Bellotti ordered the company to halt its deceptive advertising,

since there is "no credible evidence" that AIDS or herpes can be contracted from non-intimate contact.

You've heard that the Army is testing all its personnel for antibodies to the HTLV-3 virus? Well, Abbott Laboratories won an initial \$400,000 contract to provide 130,500 *ELISA* tests and 52 automated instrument systems, on which the test results are quantified. In addition to this contract, Abbott Labs will train the personnel to use the test and the equipment. A one time deal? Not likely. The Army's pristine blood supply is guaranteed only by frequent HTLV-3 tests, and only Abbott's antibody test kits can be used with Abbott's instrument systems.

Stocks for *make-up brushes* soon may be in a bull pattern of growth, thanks to Portland Opera. According to sources, make-up brushes are now burned after individual usage, due to fear of AIDS transmission.

Or you could sponsor *corporate seminars* on how to fire people with AIDS and get away with it. Law and Business, a division of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, recently charged \$395 a head for a conference in Boston on "AIDS and Drug Abuse in the Work Place."

Pastaworks

Hours:
Mon-Sat 10:30 am-6:30 pm
Sunday noon-5 pm

Peter de Garmo
Don Oman



3731 S.E. Hawthorne
Portland, Oregon 97214
(503) 232-1010

CATHARTIC COMICS

Featuring
THE BROWN BOMBER & DIVA TOUCHE FLAMBE

