

Between the lines

AIDS pamphlets and politics; paying for AZT; prescription from Abby.

BY JACK RILEY

Candidate for governor defends AIDS pamphlet

State Rep. Bob Williams of Longview, a Republican gubernatorial candidate in Washington, is coming under heavy fire from health experts for an AIDS pamphlet he mailed to 10,000 households in his Cowlitz County district.

Williams's mailing was part of a state-wide campaign by state legislators to provide uniform information about AIDS to households and school districts.

But health experts say the 21-page pamphlet, "AIDS! Common Sense Information," contains half-truths and is confusing, misleading and potentially frightening to readers.

The pamphlet, which Williams embellished with lots of exclamation points, suggests that AIDS can be transferred by casual contact and other methods besides blood and semen, and

states that anal sex is the most dangerous activity associated with the disease.

Most health experts agree that AIDS cannot be contracted by casual contact, and intravenous drug use has replaced homosexual activity as the major concern regarding spread of the disease.

Dr. Pat Kuhlberg, health officer of the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Health District, says "the pamphlet raises a lot of fears that are unnecessary... the gay population is making behavioral changes to reduce their risk."

In a letter to the *Longview Daily News*, Rep. Williams said he is not trying to pick on homosexuals. But he claims in his pamphlet that homosexual behavior is "responsible for 94 percent of AIDS cases in Washington" and states that "we need to prevent that behavior" in order to stop AIDS.

Williams says those who inferred that he was calling for a ban on homosexual activity were wrong; he insists that he is not calling for gays to be shunned.

Three hundred thousand copies of the pamphlet were printed, and some legislators added cover letters clarifying their positions on the issue. Rep. Steve Fuhrman of Kettle Falls mailed the brochure and enclosed a letter calling for a ban on homosexual activity.

Meanwhile, Michael Brady, a lawyer and the president of the Dorian Society (a gay rights organization) in Seattle, says he was shocked by the tone, as well as by the distortions in the pamphlet. "I still can't believe it was edited by doctors," he said.

Will the state pay for AZT treatments?

Expensive AZT treatments, at \$7,000 a year per patient, are one of the more effective means of prolonging the lives of those who contract AIDS.

Deciding who pays, if anyone, is one of the major issues Washington state lawmakers soon must face.

Some legislators say the state should help to pay for the treatments; other members disagree, saying it would be unfair to patients of other diseases.

Dr. King Holmes, chief of medicine at Harborview Hospital in Seattle and a member of the Governor's Task Force on AIDS, says there are as many as 30,000 patients in the state who could benefit from AZT.

In state hearings in Olympia recently, Dr. Roger Butz, Safeco Insurance Co. medical director, said he would oppose any state move to cover AZT treatment costs. He fears unequal treatment of those suffering other diseases who may face medical cutbacks to help pay for AZT.

The Governor's Task Force on AIDS will be bringing up other issues to state lawmakers in future hearings, including confidentiality of records, regulations for the sale of cards that purport to show that individuals do not have AIDS, and problems of discrimination for people who test positive for the disease.

Dear Abby worth repeating

Syndicated columnist Abigail Van Buren has generally supported gays in her *Dear Abby* column published in newspapers across the country.

In a recent column, she had a few appropriate words for a miserable married homosexual with stifled feelings.

"Are there other homosexuals who have given in to marriage and are miserable, or am I all alone?" asked a fellow who signed his letter "My Secret."

Abby answered: "Dear Secret: You are not alone. You have far more company than you (or anyone else) would ever imagine. I have a message for you — and for all the others who are in the same boat: to thine own self be true.

"You did not choose to be gay any more than I chose to be straight... and whether you act on your feelings or not, you are a homosexual. The tragedy is your unwillingness to accept yourself — and in an effort to 'protect' yourself, you involved a woman in your life. She's unfulfilled and so are you."

Abby suggested he get a divorce to "free both of you."

Cashing in on fear of AIDS

January was National Volunteer Blood Donor Month in America — an appropriate time for entrepreneurs to take advantage of the public fear of AIDS in order to make a few bucks.

In Anchorage, Alaskans are ignoring the fact that the odds of getting AIDS from a blood transfusion range from one in 220,000 to one in a million. Some of them are taking part in the Blood Bank of Alaska's new "directed donations" program.

That's where you find people who will donate blood in your name for your exclusive use. Supposedly the risk of getting AIDS is

lessened if one knows the donor pool.

Another commercial service in Anchorage offers storage of self-donated blood in the Alaska Autologous Blood Bank — for a fee, of course.

Former real-estate developer Mike Mitchell says his private bank can store frozen blood for as long as seven years at a cost of \$1,500. The sales pitch is that "no blood is as good as your own."

Before you start gathering up some friends and heading for the nearest blood bank, or start a "savings account" of your own, consider these facts:

Donated blood from personal recruits is no safer than blood from anonymous volunteers.

The real risk in transfusions is hepatitis, not AIDS.

According to Dr. Richard Counts of the Puget Sound Blood Bank in Seattle, the AIDS risk has been virtually eliminated since 1985 with development of a highly sensitive test for AIDS antibodies.

Nationwide, anywhere from 7 to 12 percent of transfusions pass on a form of hepatitis. That's where the real risk remains.

AIDS: Top 1988 political issue

When Americans go to the polls in 1988, their greatest concern will be a candidate's position on stopping the spread of AIDS, according to a recent survey conducted for the Independent Insurance Agents of America.

According to the poll, conducted by the Herman Group of Research Triangle Park, N.C., and reported in the Jan. 4 edition of *Industry Week*, the issue of least concern to the public in ranking 21 potential concerns was the state of the stock market.

A medical Pearl Harbor?

Some doctors, claiming that their "Hippocratic Oath was not to become a kamikaze pilot," are asking their patients to be tested for AIDS before surgery.

The *Gannett News Service* reports that a growing number of doctors fear becoming infected with the deadly virus and also cites evidence that those who carry the AIDS virus may not fare well in certain surgical procedures.

One study of eight infected patients who underwent open heart surgery suggests that the operation itself may have triggered the development of full-blown AIDS. All eight died within six months.

That finding has led San Francisco heart surgeon Dr. Donald Hill to recommend that "most people be tested for AIDS if they are to undergo open heart surgery." Nearly 400,000 such procedures are performed each year in the United States.

Hill, a heart transplant surgeon and head of cardiovascular surgery at Pacific Medical Center, now asks all patients in his department to be tested for HIV.

So far, less than five percent have refused to be tested.

To find out just what risk doctors are facing, the Centers for Disease Control will soon launch a large study involving doctors nationwide.

"It is well known that open heart surgery is an immunosuppressive event," explains San Francisco's Hill. A patient's blood is rerouted through a heart-lung machine and comes into contact with foreign surfaces which reduce the blood's immunity-providing powers. Transfusions, too, can reduce a person's immunity.

If surgery can be postponed, or alternative therapies used successfully, a number of prominent surgeons agree that doctors should consider those possibilities.

Says Dr. Hill: "If I have a patient I know is HIV positive, I would say to him, 'Look, there's some undefined risk that the operation may trigger you into AIDS. If we can reasonably put off your surgery for six months, let's do it! We may know more then about how to deal with this.'"



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