

Stories of gay youth stir government health officials

Various representatives of youth service organizations and sexual minority youth met with head staffers of Donna Shalala, secretary of U.S. Health and Human Services. At an unprecedented meeting the new group, the National Advocacy Coalition on Youth and Sexual Orientation, presented recommendations to Shalala's department about how it can serve youths struggling with sexual orientation and identity issues.

Particularly effective were the personal stories of several youths who shared their experiences and problems. One youth told of his experience coming out to a public high school guidance counselor at the age of 16. The youth said the counselor violated his anonymity and confidentiality by telling his parents, who then sent him to a psychiatrist. Another teenager told of being thrown out of the house after coming out and subsequently being rejected by Child Protective Services for being "too" openly gay. A third youth shared a story of rejection coupled with physical and verbal abuse from his mother. He said he attempted suicide and practiced other unhealthy behaviors before finding a youth support group for sexual minorities.

Lee Norwood

Pentagon finalizes details on military ban

The new policy on gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in the military was announced by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. The new regulations of the "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" policy include a ban on anyone openly admitting sexual orientation but also puts a stop to the "witch hunts" used to force lesbians and gay men out of the armed services.

Specifics of the guidelines include barring military police from recording the license plate numbers of cars in the parking lots of gay bars near military bases, or pursuing people whose names are found on a list of those suspected as being gay. Sexual acts between members of the same sex are also banned under the new guidelines. These acts include kissing, holding hands or otherwise "touching a person of your same sex or allowing such a person to touch you for the purpose of satisfying sexual desires."

The new policy, set to take effect Feb. 5, restricts the Pentagon from asking a service member's sexual orientation and requires any gay, lesbian or bisexual service person to hide their sexual orientation or face expulsion from the service.

Former Army Captain Tanya Domi, legisla-

tive director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, remarked that the new regulations "institutionalize and accommodate prejudice against gay people in the military." She added, "The regulations are simply a repackaging of the same prejudice and discrimination that existed under the pre-Clinton policy." The NGLTF has vowed to continue the fight against the policy. It promises to work toward the expulsion of ROTC programs from college campuses as long as the policy exists.

More than 3,500 military personnel have been discharged for being gay or lesbian since 1989.

Lee Norwood

U.S. rescinds attempt to suspend ILGA

The U.S. Mission to the U.N. has decided not to introduce a resolution seeking the suspension of the International Lesbian and Gay Association's consultative status to the U.N. Economic and Social Council because of its affiliation with the North American Man-Boy Love Association. Rather, it has agreed, with the support of several key Western nations, to give ILGA a chance to sever its ties with NAMBLA by June, as ILGA promised.

Lee Norwood

FBI's closet doors open

The FBI has agreed to adopt regulations that expressly state that sexual orientation will not be considered a negative factor in deciding security clearances or employment. It also agreed that sexual conduct will be considered equally for people regardless of sexual orientation.

The settlement came in the middle of the trial, in the U.S. District Court of San Francisco, of a class action suit initiated by former FBI agent Frank Buttino. The 20-year veteran had been fired when it became known that he was gay.

"This is a major step forward for lesbian and gay rights in federal employment, especially those requiring security clearances," said Richard Gayer, an attorney with the case.

The settlement comes one week after Attorney General Janet Reno announced that the entire Justice Department would no longer discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. It closes the remaining loop holes differentiating between orientation and conduct.

As Gayer noted, "The FBI, at least for the last three years, has claimed that they do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. But homosexual conduct, even among consenting adults, in private, caused a big, big problem."

"If they follow through in good faith, then we

can probably write them [FBI] off as a closed book and it is done," said Frank Kameny, a gay activist and expert on federal employment and security clearance matters. However, he noted that often "the best of intentions and good faith from the top" are marred by "spotty implementation down below." He says continued vigilance is necessary.

The language of the settlement is being reviewed in Washington. The settlement also involves restitution to Buttino and would allow him to return to work as an FBI agent. He has since chosen to pursue other career options.

Another party to the suit, Dana Tillson, had been denied hiring when it was learned she was a lesbian. She will be hired in the next training class for new FBI agents, though that may not be until next fall due to a hiring freeze at the Bureau.

Bob Roehr

Anti-gay politics documented

Hostile Climate: A State-By-State Report on Anti-Gay Activity was just released by People For the American Way, a 300,000 member nonpartisan constitutional liberties organization.

The 60-page report "documents a wide range of incidents in the arena of public policy that were intended to restrict the rights of gays and lesbians." It covers an 11 month period ending with September 1993—focusing on state and local activities, not national ones.

The report noted that the last year has seen unprecedented public attention given to gay and lesbian concerns—some beneficial—but "it has also sparked a strong backlash of intolerance in communities across America. The spread of anti-gay political activity has reached a point where millions of American citizens now feel that their most basic rights are being held hostage to a particularly virulent form of hate politics." Central to this is the religious right's role in "exacerbating intolerance...Implicit in their choice of targets is the cold political calculation that this is one form of bigotry they can still exploit without fear of public censure." It noted the latest tactic is to try to "drive a wedge between" queers and other minority populations, particularly African Americans.

Bob Roehr

'Cover-up' led to deaths, group charges

The Health Research Group of Public Citizen, Ralph Nader's public advocacy group, is charging Eli Lilly, Inc. with a cover-up of data which led to the deaths of five people in clinical trials of the experimental hepatitis B drug FIAU.

The phase II clinical trial had taken place at the National Institutes of Health in the spring and summer of 1993. Three of the dead and several of those who survive with liver damage are known to be gay.

FIAU is a nucleoside analog, the same family of anti-virals as the principal HIV drugs AZT, ddC, and ddI. There is some evidence of toxicity in all of these drugs.

"It is clear that this tragedy could have been prevented but for a cover-up of data on liver toxicity by Eli Lilly, Inc., the licensee of the drug," read the opening paragraph of the letter sent to Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler by Health Research Group Director Dr. Sidney Wolfe.

The letter and accompanying nine-page report, dated Dec. 9, detailed the complaints that HRG found. It cited liver toxicity in animal studies which were incorrectly interpreted, and toxicity tests in normal volunteers (people not infected with hepatitis B) which were not reported in a timely manner.

"There is no question that Eli Lilly should have stopped the NIH trial by the end of March, or in the first days of April, before three of the five patients who eventually died had gotten any doses of FIAU and at a time when two of the others who died had gotten only a fraction of the dose that would eventually kill them.

"Not only did Eli Lilly fail to get NIH to stop the trial, but the company did not inform NIH in a timely manner that one normal volunteer was hospitalized in Indianapolis because of FIAU liver toxicity after only two doses on the drug."

Lilly spokesman Ed West responded: "Dr. Wolfe has characterized this in a typically sensational manner without regard to the facts."

Wolfe's work was built upon the 90-page FDA task force report, "Fialuridine (FIAU): Hepatic and Pancreatic Toxicity," which was released on Nov. 12. The FDA report was unusually strong, though it did not go as far as Wolfe did in laying blame.

Two of the task force's more telling comments read: "Optimism may sometimes unconsciously lead investigators and sponsors to attribute signs of drug toxicity to other more positive causes. Failure to report the cause of death accurately may have obscured an early instance of fatal event caused by FIAU."

The report called for major revisions in the design, analysis and reporting of clinical trials.

The saga of FIAU is ongoing. The NIH is still at work on its investigation of what went wrong. Rep. Edolphus Towns (D-NY) will chair committee hearings early next year. Several of the injured surviving patients, as well as the heirs of those who died, are pursuing legal action.

Bob Roehr

cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambe by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

