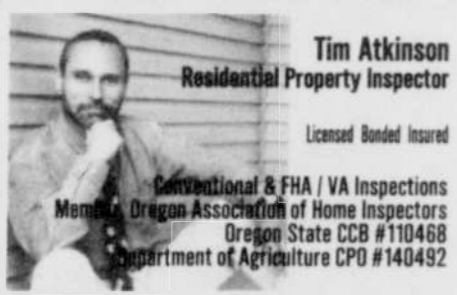


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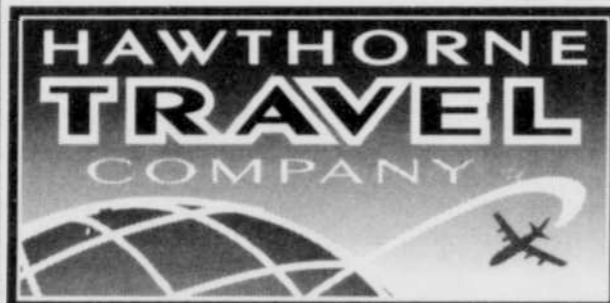
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national news

False assumptions hinder lesbian health care

Two original research articles published in the first issue of the *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association* reveal the need for greater understanding among health care workers of lesbian sexual practices, and increased awareness among lesbians of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and gynecological infections.

"These studies make it clear that the assumptions commonly held within the lesbian community and by health care providers—that lesbians don't sleep with men and that female-to-female transmission of STDs can't occur—are faulty," said GLMA's public policy director Marj Plumb.

"HIV Risk Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women," to date the largest qualitative study of HIV risk-taking among queer women, found that many lesbians and bisexual women do not believe they are at risk for contracting HIV when having unprotected sex with other women. Through more than 500 peer interviews conducted at women's clubs and events in San Francisco, researchers learned that women often think it is riskier to have sex with women who identify as bisexual than with women who identify as lesbian. However, the study shows that women who identify as lesbian also have sex with men, and when they do are less likely than bisexual women to use a condom. Twenty percent of the women surveyed said they have had unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex with men. Co-authors Patricia E. Stevens, R.N., Ph.D., and Joanne M. Hall, R.N., Ph.D., say this is evidence that women's decisions in this arena are based on their emotions and social needs, and educational programs need to reflect that.

The second study emphasizes the need for regular STD screening for lesbians. A survey of 421 women in eastern Massachusetts found that STDs such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, genital herpes and trichomonas are more common among lesbians who have had sex with men in the past (more than 80 percent of lesbian respondents). Researchers still found clear evidence of female-to-female transmission, however, and warn that lesbians, because they typically are not screened for STDs, may be unknowingly transmitting STDs and gynecological infections to their partners.



Morning-after HIV treatment gains attention

Health care providers and policymakers are debating whether to make anti-HIV drug therapies widely available as a morning-after treatment for people recently exposed to the virus through unsafe sex. According to a story in the *Boston Globe*, a meeting to discuss the proposal, which is modeled after preventive treatment routinely offered to health care workers who have been exposed to HIV, is scheduled for July at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Prompt antiviral treatment following accidental exposure in a medical setting has proven highly effective. Little research has been done, however, on the usefulness of post-exposure treatment involving unprotected sex with an HIV-positive partner. Some studies have suggested that the risk of HIV transmission depends on the type of exposure and therefore could be substantially higher for sexual encounters than in cases of occupational exposure.

While the public debate regarding this treatment method is only just beginning, the morning-after approach is already being quietly used in Boston and other cities. Researchers in San Francisco, meanwhile, are planning a large-scale test

of the method. Many people working in the prevention field are uneasy about the potential impact on sexual practices and decisions of widespread availability of the treatment, but also worry about withholding a treatment that could stop the infection. Other concerns are timing and the cost



of post-exposure therapy, estimated at nearly \$1,000 for one month of three-drug treatment on a very strict regimen. Failure to complete the course of treatment or to follow the prescribed regimen could result in the emergence of drug-resistant strains of the virus, an especially ominous possibility among people engaging in high-risk sex.

Law students' suit threatens to topple activity fee system

When three Republican Christian law students sued the University of Wisconsin last year, charging that forcing them to pay for gay-rights groups and a campus women's center violated their First Amendment rights, few at the generally liberal campus expected the case would get very far. Now, pending an appeal before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court in Chicago, public universities in Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana might have to revise their system for funding student activities. According to a *Chicago Tribune* report, although the issue of student activity fees has shaken college campuses in the past, and made it as far as the U.S. Supreme Court, this is the first time a federal appeals court has examined a challenge to the entire system of funding student groups on First Amendment grounds.

In 1995, the nation's high court ruled that the University of Virginia could not deny funding for a religious group. That ruling did not specifically address the potential violation of the First Amendment, but a concurring opinion written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor suggested that the mandatory fee system could be susceptible to such a challenge.

The California Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that students could not be forced to pay for groups they opposed; an appeal of that case was rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The plaintiffs in the Wisconsin case recognize the right of advocacy groups to be on campus, but say they should raise their own funds. Without university support, however, many of those groups would be unable to offer the activities they do. In the case of the gay and lesbian organizations and women's center specifically mentioned in the plaintiff's complaint, they could not provide counseling services and support groups.

"This will disproportionately disadvantage controversial groups or ones that are small in number, the groups that need supported access to get their ideas out," said Ruth Harlow of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Open letter attacks gay-positive airline

An ad campaign aimed at American Airlines and its gay-friendly policies began May 28 with an open letter to company CEO Robert Crandall that appeared in the *Washington Times* and other papers, according to a news release on the PRNewswire. The letter, signed by leaders of the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, the American Family Association, Concerned Women for America and other right-wing activist groups, criticizes the airline for offering discount fares to homosexual partners, sponsoring pride events and making donations to queer activist groups. Human Rights Campaign and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays were

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