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national news

Drug success affects risky practices

The success of antiretroviral drug cocktails is changing the way gay men perceive the risk of contracting HIV, a San Francisco-based team of researchers reported in the August issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

University of California researchers questioned 54 men about their attitudes toward unprotected anal intercourse, and found 26 percent were less concerned about becoming HIV-positive in light of protease inhibitor therapies, which have been publicly trumpeted as a near cure for AIDS.

Seven of the men interviewed said explicitly that availability of new drugs made them more willing to risk transmission of HIV through sex; eight men said they had already taken such chances.

Attempts to prevent the spread of HIV must take into account these changing perceptions regarding the risk of infection, say the researchers, otherwise the readily available treatments pose potential new public health problems because they may influence risky sexual behavior.



US West extends domestic partner benefits

Same-sex domestic partners of US West employees will be offered health-care benefits that heterosexual employees' spouses now receive. Eligible dependents of same-sex partners will also be covered.

The change applies to all employees of US West, including US West Communications and US West Media Group. US West has 69,000 employees in 14 states.

"The time is right to expand eligibility for our health-care offerings in this way," says Toni Ozeroff, US West vice president. "Good employees should have a good health-care package, and we have both at US West." Ozeroff adds that extending coverage to same-sex domestic partners will help the company attract and retain qualified employees.

Employees are currently being notified of the news, and open enrollment materials are scheduled to be mailed to their homes in the latter half of September. The enrollment period will run through October, and coverage will take effect January 1998.

Queer congress in session

Activists will converge on San Diego for five days, Nov. 12-16, for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 10th annual conference.

This year's Creating Change Conference will feature more than 120 workshops and networking sessions designed to build the skills of organizers working at state and local levels.

Keynote speakers for the event include California Assembly Speaker Pro Tem Sheila Kuhl, National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization Executive Director Martin Ornelas-Quintero, and author Dorothy Allison, who will deliver the Vito Russo Lecture on Art and Politics.

Workshop topics cover a wide range of issues, such as sodomy laws, marriage, fundraising, people of faith, youth and campus organizing, media advocacy and public speaking, workplace organizing and anti-violence campaigns.

For information about Creating Change, visit the NGLTF web site at <http://www.nglftf.org/cc97> or call (202) 332-6483, ext. 3329.

One lump or two?

La Nouvelle Justine, a New York restaurant that takes its name from a Marquis de Sade novel, is redefining table service by offering mild sado-masochism along with French cuisine, reports The Associated Press.

"A restaurant is all about service anyhow," says co-owner Robert Jason, 29. "We've just taken the servant and master theme and exploded it."

The establishment, which is somewhat frowned upon by hard-core fetishists, draws a weekend crowd of giggling voyeurs and campy celebrities like Joan Rivers. Dim lighting and medieval art set the scene, while dominants (a.k.a. waiters and waitresses) and slaves (vinyl-sheathed and dog-collared busboys) keep the customers occupied between courses.

"It was totally worthwhile—there's nothing like seeing your loved ones get put in their proper place," patron Tina Block told a reporter after



ordering \$20 spankings for both her brother and her boyfriend. "I'd also like to get one for my mother, but I don't think she'd be into it. Then again, she did it to me," the 30-year-old secretary added.

Western medicine warms to alternative therapies

Responding to patient demand, doctors at the University of California at San Francisco are beginning to incorporate spirituality and alternative therapies into the healing process by offering an eight-week stress reduction course.

United Press International says 30 HIV-positive patients attended the center's first day-long healing retreat earlier this summer.

The focus of UCSF's program is on meditation, attitudinal healing, spirituality and personal empowerment as auxiliaries to traditional Western medicine.

Ken Farber, who runs the university's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Well-Being Program, says most people who complete the course report a decrease in physical and psychological symptoms. He also points to earlier studies which have shown that the integration of behavioral and relaxation therapies with conventional medicine aids in recovery from back ailments.

From grassroots to corporate sponsorship

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation says the theme for the fourth annual Gay and Lesbian History Month—held during October—will be *Charting the Future, Reclaiming the Past*.

Cosponsors of the month-long celebration include the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum; Dignity USA; BiNet USA; National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization; GenderPAC; Human Rights Campaign; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Gay and Lesbian Parents

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