



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

A promising experimental HIV therapy is the latest weapon in the battle against AIDS

COURT URGED TO UPHOLD DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund is urging the Washington Supreme Court to reject a conservative taxpayer's assault on Vancouver's domestic partner benefits plan and to leave in place the city's family benefits plan for unmarried city employees. Arguments were heard in the case May 31.

"Vancouver recognizes that providing equal insurance benefits to unmarried city employees is simply the fair thing to do," Lambda senior staff attorney Jennifer C. Pizer said. "Vancouver and its residents benefit when all city employees can rest assured that their families have basic insurance coverage, because peace of mind improves morale and effectiveness in the workplace."

Lambda and the American Civil Liberties Union argue that home rule cities like Vancouver, under Washington law, have substantial power to govern themselves; they filed a brief outlining why Vancouver, as an employer, is well-served by its partner benefits plan. The brief points out that there is no conflict between this local law and state law, in that Washington law protects people in unmarried relationships in various ways. Additionally, the brief refutes the argument that the local law creates confusion between the limited, taxable partner benefits offered to unmarried city workers and the comprehensive legal recognition provided by Washington's marriage laws.

In 1998, Vancouver extended its family benefits plan to unmarried, gay and nongay, city employees. The conservative Virginia-based Northstar Legal Center sued in 1999 on behalf of a local resident, Roni Heinsma, contending that the city cannot extend health benefits or any other protection to unmarried employees in committed relationships because doing so purportedly would conflict with Washington state marriage law.

In June 2000, the trial court rejected these arguments and ruled definitively in the city's favor, pointing out that Vancouver has not tried to regulate family relationships in general as the marriage laws do but instead simply is ensuring reasonable compensation for its own employees. Heinsma then appealed.

Shortly after receiving the Lambda/ACLU brief, the Court of Appeals, on its own motion, asked the Washington Supreme Court to accept review of the case. Lambda has helped cities and counties around the country defend domestic partner benefits for unmarried employees, defeating attacks in areas such as Atlanta; Chicago; New York; Santa Barbara, Calif.; Pima County, Ariz.; and Broward County, Fla.

GROUP WILL LAUNCH STUDY ON HIV TREATMENT

The Research and Education Group is seeking volunteer participants in a new research study for Interleukin-2, a promising experimental HIV therapy. Evaluation of Subcutaneous Proleukin in a Randomized International Trial, or ESPRIT, will enroll 4,000 subjects from around the world.

Interleukin-2 is a naturally occurring protein made by human white blood cells. A synthetic version is used as HIV treatment. Dramatic increases in CD4 cell counts are seen in most patients who take the treatment.

The research is seeking an answer to the question: Does a rise in CD4 cells caused by this treatment translate into clinical benefits and a longer life for HIV-positive patients? The study is set to run for five years.

The Research and Education Group, a public nonprofit organization, is composed of physicians and health care professionals committed to providing access to community-based AIDS clinical trials of new and investigational drugs and the study of promising HIV therapies.

For more information call 503-229-8428 or 800-875-8428 or visit the Internet site www.reg.org.

RESEARCH LEADS TO NEW WORKSHOPS FOR COUPLES

A Seattle-based organization is offering new relationship workshops for gay and lesbian couples. The Gottman Institute based the summer workshops on a 12-year study of gay and lesbian couples by doctors at University of Washington and University of California at Berkeley.

Their research indicates gay and lesbian relationships have strengths that straight couples do not. The workshops are designed to help couples build on those strengths and recognize the differences unique to gay and lesbian relationships.

The research also found that gay and lesbian couples experience about the same satisfaction as straight couples, tend to be more upbeat in dealing with conflict and use fewer controlling, hostile-emotion tactics. According to the study, lesbian couples express both positive and negative emotions more than gay men.

The two-day workshop, "Honoring Gay and Lesbian Relationships," will be held at Seattle Center—June 16 and 17 for lesbians, July 14 and 15 for gay men. Tuition is \$350 a couple.

For more information call 206-523-9042 or 888-523-9042 or visit the Internet site www.gottman.com.

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