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For more information call 503-231-5759 or visit www.equityfoundation.org.

**MULTNOMAH COUNTY
SYPHILIS CASES QUADRUPLE**

In step with a national trend, syphilis cases in Multnomah County have increased more than four times among men who have sex with men (MSM). According to Margaret Lentell, the county's sexually transmitted disease program manager, 18 cases were reported in 2002, compared with only four the previous year.

The spike in infection rates is so alarming, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will visit Oregon this month to work with the county and its collaborative partners, such as Cascade AIDS Project and the state health department, in an attempt to prevent the situation from escalating, as it has in Seattle, Los Angeles and New York.

When syphilis rates rise, Lentell says, the CDC can send out disease intervention specialists. But that's effective only when sexual partners can be identified and informed. Among MSM cases, anonymous partners connect primarily at bathhouses or through Internet chat rooms.

In the most recent case, a man reported that he had 150 partners in the past six months. Because syphilis symptoms are not always apparent, county officials now worry that a growing number of potentially infected people who are sexually active have not been tested or treated.

CDC representatives will conduct an ethnographic survey in which they will interview county residents to acquire more concrete data about sexual activity, customs and social norms. By helping determine what drives unsafe sexual activity, the health department will be able to better focus its intervention activities. The

CDC also will offer internal epidemiological support to ensure an effective evaluation and response to this growing public health concern.

In an effort to step up its outreach to the hard-hit gay community, the county program and Cascade AIDS Project will have booths at Portland Pride 2003 on June 14 and 15 at Waterfront Park. Visitors can pick up information about sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and HIV and receive saliva-based HIV testing and vouchers for free STD testing.

For more information call 503-988-3700.

**STUDENTS CANCEL
BLOOD DRIVE**

A blood drive at Southern Oregon University in Ashland was canceled last month when students objected to eligibility guidelines that discriminate against gay men, The Associated Press reported.

Men who have had sex with another man, even once since 1977, cannot participate, according to blood donation guidelines established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and implemented by blood collection agencies such as the American Red Cross. The waiting period is only a year, however, for a woman who has had sex with a man who has had sex with another man.

"From my understanding, it's a rule that they made up in the 1980s, and people are not up to date," said SOU multicultural senator David Adkins-Brown, whose petition contended that the criteria violate existing anti-discrimination policies on campus.

Deanna Leitner of SOU's Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans and Allies Student Union told the *Mail Tribune*: "The issue marginalizes [gay] men as people to be feared. We have never been against the Red Cross. We are seeking a way to rectify the Red Cross and SOU policy."

Dr. Leslie Holness, a medical officer with a division of the FDA handling blood applications, told the AP, "You have to balance how much good you're doing with a safe blood supply with the bad feelings you're stirring in groups of people."

The Portland-based Pacific Northwest regional office of the Red Cross met with students in a May 28 forum and forwarded their concerns to national officials.

**OUTSIDE IN AWARDED
\$1 MILLION**

At a time when government resources are down and social needs are up, Outside In



Deanna Leitner of Southern Oregon University's queer student union says the Red Cross policy marginalizes gay men

has received some extremely promising support through a \$1 million award from the federal government. The Department of Health and Human Services will provide the non-profit organization with \$200,000 annually for five years.

The money will support six transitional housing units for homeless youth ages 16 to 21—three units on site at Outside In and three apartments in the community—and will pay for staff to help provide 24-hour supervision. Funds also will provide support services needed for these kids to achieve independent living, including case managers and a mental health specialist.

According to executive director Kathy Oliver, as economic uncertainties prevail and unemployment remains high, the need for transitional housing for homeless youth working toward self-sufficiency has greatly increased. Queer and questioning kids reportedly constitute nearly 40 percent of the homeless clients served by Outside In.

"I'm proud that Outside In is able to bring a significant federal grant into this community during this time of budget deficits and cuts by local governments," Oliver said in a statement. "This is an important grant for some of Portland's most vulnerable people—homeless

youth—and will help them trade street life for self-sufficiency."

**GAY MAN RUNS FOR
SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL**

A gay man, Tom Rasmussen, is vying for a Seattle City Council seat in the Sept. 16 primary. If elected, he would be the first queer on the council in eight years.

"He has a broad base of support, knowledge and experience, and that will help him build the

coalition he needs to win this race," said Chuck Wolfe, executive director of the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, a Washington, D.C.-based political action committee that supports openly gay and lesbian candidates for office. "His advocacy

runs the gamut from aging issues to LGBT civil rights to working on behalf of those with disabilities. Tom has a long and remarkable track record of public service."

In the fall of 1991, Sherry Harris became the nation's first black lesbian city council member when she beat a 24-year incumbent. She has since left office. □

Compiled by JIM RADOSTA and TIMOTHY KRAUSE

"This is an important grant for some of Portland's most vulnerable people—homeless youth—and will help them trade street life for self-sufficiency"

—Kathy Oliver

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