

NORTHWEST BRIEFS

Red Cross and Q Center Host CPR Class

In an effort to reach out to the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community, the Portland chapter of the American Red Cross is hosting a CPR workshop at the Q Center.

It might seem like the two organizations make unlikely bedfellows—the Red Cross has not allowed blood donations from gay men since the FDA prohibited it in 1983—yet the prohibition is one of the reasons why the organizations are coming together.

“This event promotes communication and open dialogue within our community, especially in regards to the conversations about stigma. It also promotes the well-being of our community, which we think is a-ok,” said Glenn Goodfellow, operations coordinator for Q Center.

The ban on donations from any man who has had sex with another man any time since 1977—the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the United States—is intended to curb the spread of HIV through blood transfusions. Many European countries also exclude donations of men who have sex with men.

The FDA claims that its policy is based on risk factors associated with gay male donors, and is not discriminatory. The policy is “based on the documented increased risk of certain transfusion transmissible infections, such as HIV, associated with male-to-male sex and is not based on any judgment concerning the donor’s sexual orientation.”

The FDA states that gay male donors have an HIV prevalence over 15 times greater than the general population and over 2000 times greater than current repeat blood donors (i.e., those who have been negatively screened and tested) in the U.S.: “Men who have sex with men continue to account for the largest number of people newly infected with HIV.”

Because the FDA is the regulatory authority over the entire blood-banking industry, the American Red Cross—and all blood banks in the nation—has no option but to follow its policy.

“I am an openly gay man who worked in HIV/AIDS and GLBT rights for 20 years, and am currently the regional executive for American Red Cross in Oregon. I agree that the lifetime ban on gay/bi men being able to donate blood is a needless, discriminatory policy adopted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) years ago during the peak of HIV/AIDS-phobia in this country,” said Thomas Bruner, executive director of the Portland chapter of the Red Cross.

“The American Red Cross continues to oppose this policy, and will continue to educate the FDA and others on the need to reverse this ban.”

In addition to making sure that the class’ instructor is ready for the potential barrage of questions that participants may ask, the Red Cross is using a gay instructor for the course.

The CPR class is not the first partnership between the gay, lesbian, bi and trans population and the Red Cross—last June, Q Center hosted a lesbian blood drive. But it’s the first event open to the entire community.

The class, which takes place 1-5 p.m., Sat., May 2 at Q Center’s new location (4115 N Mississippi Ave.), costs \$37. \$5 of the fee will go directly to Q Center.

—Adina Lepp

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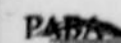
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