

AIDS strikes Blacks at high rate

by Henry Duvall

A close look at the victims of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) reveals a disproportionate number of Blacks struck by the deadly disease, while more than half of the nation's children with AIDS are Black.

Citing recent data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Dr. Wayne Greaves, chief of the division of infectious diseases at Howard University Hospital in Washington, D.C., notes that he has found "a lot more cases among Blacks than we previously thought."

Nationally, Blacks comprise 25 percent of all victims of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome — more than double the 12 percent Black population in the nation. And some 56 percent of the nation's children hit by AIDS are Black, Greaves emphasized in an interview.

Since the AIDS virus was first reported in this country in 1981, more than 13,400 Americans have been afflicted by the disease, which destroys the body's immune system and is ultimately fatal. Blacks account for more than 3,300 of those victims, says Greaves, formerly with the CDC in Atlanta, indicating that half of all Americans contracting the disease have died.

Of the known "pediatric cases" — comprising children under 13 — 107 of 191 children with AIDS have been Black, he adds, noting that children make up about one percent of all AIDS cases reported in the United States.

The epidemiologist points to the state of Maryland as a good example of the disproportionately high incidence among Blacks. In that state, 116 of the 222 known cases have been Black victims, accounting for 52 percent — more than double the 22 percent Black population in Maryland, he stresses.

Like the disease itself, mystery shrouds the reasons why there is a high AIDS incidence among Blacks.

"There's still belief (in the Black community) that AIDS is a white man's disease," says Greaves, who is also an assistant professor of medicine at Howard. "AIDS is color blind."

Another problem is that Blacks often tend to seek health care when a medical problem has reached an advanced stage of development. At Howard University Hospital, where most AIDS victims treated thus far have been Black, AIDS sufferers have generally lived about six to eight months after diagnosis of the disease. The median survival nationally is 18 months from diagnosis to death.

While Greaves is on what he calls "the front line" of treating AIDS patients, his colleague, Dr. Winston Frederick, assistant professor of medi-



Dr. Wayne Greaves, chief of infectious diseases at Howard University Hospital, consults with Dr. Soon-Young Park of the university's College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences on drug treatment of AIDS patients, most of whom are Black at the Washington, D.C., hospital. Greaves emphasizes that nationally Blacks comprise 25 percent of all AIDS victims — more than double the 12 percent Black population of the nation. (Photo: Harlee Little)

cine at Howard, is trying to unlock the secrets of AIDS. The former National Institutes of Health researcher is conducting research to find certain parameters or "reliable markers" that may give clues to the disease's development.

So far, AIDS has primarily struck homosexual and bisexual men, intravenous (IV) drug abusers and recipients of contaminated blood. But in these high-risk groups, a stark difference emerges between white and Black AIDS victims.

According to Greaves, about 85 percent of the nation's whites with the disease are gay and eight percent are intravenous drug abusers. Among Black AIDS victims, 49 percent are gay and 38 percent are IV drug abusers.

He believes that more attention needs to be given to drug abusers.

Dr. Alyce Gullattee, director of Howard University Hospital's Institute for Drug Abuse and Addiction, agrees, pointing out that intravenous drug abusers may pose a greater risk of spreading the virus to the general public than homosexuals. Drug abusers can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or prostitutes — "a microcosm of the population," she stresses.

"So many lives are touched by drug abusers," she continues, adding that they generally have children more frequently than homosexuals or bisexuals. Children can contract the disease before or during birth by transmission from infected expectant mothers, as well as through blood transfusions.

The high concentration of Black

AIDS victims is found in urban areas that have fairly large Black populations, says Greaves. Many who contract the fatal disease, for which there's no cure, are in their 30s.

Greaves believes public education is the key to AIDS prevention and to overcoming the fears, uncertainties and misinformation about AIDS. People need to know that AIDS is deadly and spreading.

"You're setting yourself up for early death," Gullattee tells her drug patients, informing them that they are in an AIDS high-risk group.

Greaves suggests that "safe sex" practices should prevail — avoiding multiple sex partners or promiscuity which can increase the risks of contracting the largely sexually transmitted disease. And blood transfusions should be performed only under "dire (medical) circumstances."

One education program at Howard, although not targeted to the general public, trains medical students to diagnose and manage patients with sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

Last year, the Centers for Disease

Control awarded a \$250,000 grant to Howard over three years, launching the Sexually Transmitted Disease Training Program for senior medical students. Howard is one of only six universities nationwide funded by the CDC for such training, says Greaves, noting that training is conducted in cooperation with local health departments.

"If my time weren't fully taken up with other academic duties," Greaves notes, "I would devote it to lobbying hard for addressing the issue or studying the problem of why there's a disproportionate number of Blacks affected (by AIDS), particularly the pediatric cases."

OHSU dental school make dentures available

Complete dentures at a substantially reduced cost are available to new patients at the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) School of Dentistry.

"The dentures are constructed by dental students in the OHSU's Dental clinic under the direct supervision of faculty dentists," said Dr. Sebastian Campagna, chairman of the school's department of removable prosthodontics.

"We can accept new patients right away and can take as many as 500 patients each year in this special program," he added.

The cost to patients for this service is substantially reduced. Services provided include a complete oral examination, X-rays and a complete set of high quality upper and lower dentures. Patients who are accepted for treatment must be able to visit the OHSU Dental Clinic twice a week for five to six weeks.

"This program serves a dual purpose," Campagna said. "It helps fulfill the need for dentures among people who could not otherwise afford them, and it also allows our students to gain the needed experience and training required for their professional education."

For more information about the denture program, contact the OHSU School of Dentistry at 225-8815.

Free Family Forum: 'Caring for Older Relatives'

"Aging Relatives, Your Family and You" is the title of a free Family Forum, sponsored by Metropolitan Family Service, to be held Wednesday, Nov. 6, at 7:30 p.m. at Augustana Lutheran Church, 2710 NE 14th Avenue.

Families who are facing the challenges of finding appropriate care and housing alternatives for older family members are encouraged to attend. Representatives from a variety of family service agencies will answer questions and share information on their services and programs.

The subject will be explored in depth in a six-part series to be held Thursday evenings beginning Nov. 14, also sponsored by Metropolitan Family Service. A small fee will be charged for the series, which includes discussion of changing family roles and responsibilities, available care options, family communications, understanding the older relative, and developing effective contacts with service providers.

Those wishing additional information, or registration, may call Metropolitan Family Service at 228-7238.

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What you should know about taking everyday drugs

Most drugs sold in pharmacies in the United States are safe and work as intended. Just the same, it's best to exercise great care when taking any medication: don't take more than the recommended dosages and watch out for undesirable side effects.

That advice should be especially heeded when taking such commonly available over-the-counter medications like aspirin and cold remedies, or frequently prescribed drugs like birth control pills and tranquilizers.

Here are consumer tips on 10 commonly used drug types:

- **Aspirin.** Never take more than two 5-grain tablets every four hours for a maximum of 10 days — three for fever. Before taking another drug or undergoing surgery, tell your doctor if you've been taking aspirin.

- **Some potential side effects:** stomach pain and nausea. Ringing in the ears is also possible, but that's generally the sign of a high dose and goes away when you stop taking the drug.

- **Acetaminophen.** Although this aspirin substitute is generally free of side effects, a large overdose can lead to serious, even fatal liver damage. The recommended dosage is the same as for aspirin.

- **Antacids.** It's best to take them one hour after meals and *not* with other medicines. Excessive use can lead to constipation or diarrhea.

- **Cold Medications.** No drugs can cure a cold; they can, however, relieve symptoms. Thus, if your doctor prescribes cold medication, ask why. If it's an antibiotic — which will not cure the cold — it may be a waste of money.

- **Allergy Drugs.** Like cold medications, generally they only relieve symptoms. Antihistamines should not be taken by people with glaucoma, or by men with enlarged prostates, and not combined with alcohol. Besides drowsiness, they can cause dry mouth, nose and throat.

- **Antibiotics.** Because these prescription drugs work overtime, it's important to keep taking them even after

your symptoms disappear. Also, read the label to find out if they should be taken *only* on an empty stomach. Watch out for allergies, and be careful of overuse, which may lead to the development of resistant strains of micro-organisms.

- **Birth Control Pills.** "The Pill" is the most widely studied drug in history. After two decades, scientists have learned that:

- The risk of heart disease and stroke increases in women over age 35 who smoke while on the pill.

- It's not recommended for women with high blood pressure, diabetes, liver disease or a family history of heart disease, regardless of age.

- Hormonal fluctuations in pill users can alleviate symptoms of depression in some women and worsen them in others.

- There's no firm evidence that the pill causes cancer.

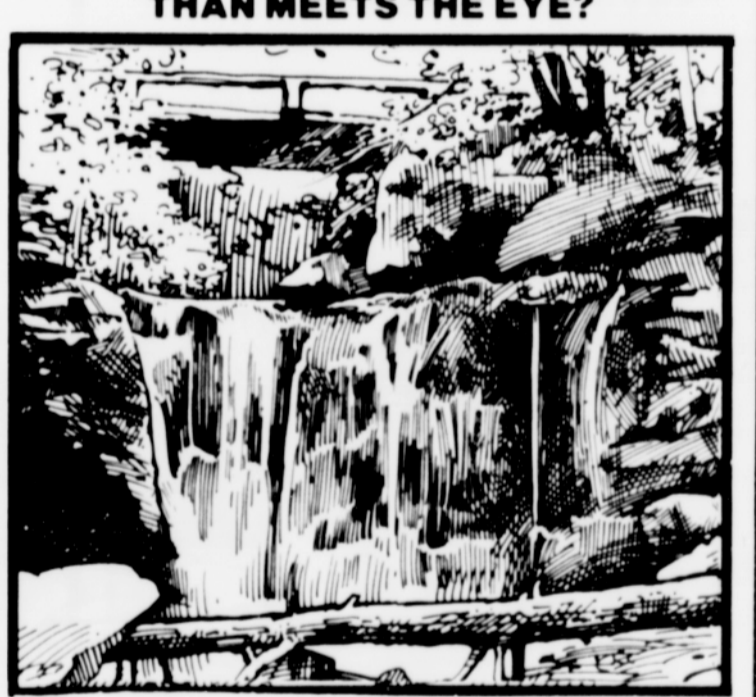
- Newer-formula pills — containing lower doses of estrogen and progesterone — are less likely to cause weight change, breast tenderness, abdominal cramps or skin discoloration, but more likely to cause menstrual irregularities.

- **Diet Aids.** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is still weighing evidence before deciding if phenylpropanolamine (PPA) contained in diet aids is completely safe. (The FDA finds PPA safe and effective for a short-time use.) Two Washington, D.C., consumer groups, however, recommend not using it.

- **Tranquilizers.** Overuse of drugs like Valium can lead to tolerance, making you need more of the drug. And sudden withdrawal can lead to unpleasant symptoms.

- **Sleep aids.** The FDA has approved sleep aids for "occasional use" only. Unless instructed to do so by their physicians, people with mild or infrequent sleeping difficulties should not use potent drugs prescribed for patients with chronic or severe insomnia.

YOUR WATER: IS THERE MORE THERE THAN MEETS THE EYE?



FACT: Millions of private and public wells have been found to be contaminated. In 1982, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) randomly checked 400 municipal wells in 1981. It found that 99 contained toxic chemicals.

FACT: Chlorine reacts with organic material in water to form Trihalomethanes (THMs). The EPA reports that THMs are most concentrated in the raw water found in most municipal water systems. But THMs are suspected cancer-causing agents.

FACT: In 1980, the U.S. Government's Council on Environmental Quality reported that chlorine added to water increased the risk of urinary tract and gastrointestinal cancer.

FACT: Bottled water isn't regularly monitored for some toxic chemicals, except in states like New York where monitoring is required. In 1982, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported that bottled water tested in 46 of 110 brands contained hazardous chemicals in 46 of 110 brands.

FACT: The EPA has identified serious groundwater contamination in 34 states.

FACT: The United States Geological Survey reports serious contamination in many states.

Once a groundwater supply is contaminated, it can take generations to clean up. And though government, industry, and municipalities are doing a better job, many of us want the best possible water now — not sometime in the future.

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