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○ Spring | ○ Vol. 2 | ○ 2007

Your Sexual Health

ADDRESSING THE SEXUAL HEALTH OF HIV POSITIVE MEN.

A Team Approach to Healthcare

April is STD Awareness Month so this issue will focus on the providers of STD care at San Francisco's STD center, City Clinic, and current trends in STDs with an emphasis on syphilis.

Many of the patients who come to City Clinic don't realize that although there are physicians on staff, in all likelihood the person who takes their sexual history, does their physical exam, determines their diagnosis, and orders the treatment is not a medical doctor but a nurse practitioner (NP). NPs provide primary care throughout the Department of Public Health as well as many other health care systems such as Kaiser. I've been an NP at City Clinic for 14 years and I've seen a number of changes in the world of STDs. One of the most significant changes I've experienced is the re-emergence of syphilis in our community.

When I started at City Clinic in 1993, syphilis was a disease that was rarely seen. It was prevalent during the post Stonewall decade of the 70s with a high of about 2000 cases a year in San Francisco. However, by the mid 80s with the advent of AIDS awareness and the resulting practice of safe sex, STDs and especially syphilis declined dramatically. In fact by the mid 90s public health experts in the country were talking about syphilis elimination.

By the end of the 90s things changed and syphilis began making a comeback, primarily among HIV positive gay men. A number of factors have been examined to explain this resurgence such as the decrease of safe sex among gay men, especially those who are HIV positive, the use of methamphetamines, and even the phenomenon of internet hooking up. These may indeed be co-factors but it's also important to understand that many of the cases of syphilis we see don't involve any of these variables. Our essential

message is that syphilis is present again in the gay community and it can be transmitted by just about any kind of sex.

We need to be concerned about syphilis because it is a much more serious disease than the more common gonorrhea or chlamydia. While it is completely curable it can cause serious irreversible damage, especially to the neurological system, if allowed to persist without treatment. Having syphilis once does not confer immunity from future infections and we have seen many patients who've had syphilis 3 or more times.

The primary method of testing for syphilis is a simple blood test. Among sexually active gay men this should be done on a regular basis. And how often is that? At the City Clinic HIV Early Care Program we instituted a policy of drawing a syphilis blood test every time we draw blood for T cells and viral loads, roughly every three months. I would recommend that all sexually active HIV positive gay men follow this example. I know that many men assume that their medical providers are doing this already but having worked with many people with syphilis in San Francisco I know that this often gets overlooked. The solution is to speak directly with your MD or NP and make sure that your blood is being checked for syphilis each and every time your routine blood work is done. Not a bad idea to get tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia while you're at it. And since April is STD Awareness Month, now is as good a time as any to begin.

Stefan Rowniak, RN, FNP



Compliments of





A Few More Things to Know About Speed

The San Francisco's STD Prevention and Control Services and the STOP AIDS Project have teamed up to publish a new educational brochure, "A Few More Things to Know About Speed." More than 10,000 copies are making their way into bars, clubs, organizations, and clinics throughout the city.

The brochure pulls together materials and information from multiple sources on the use of speed (aka crystal methamphetamine). Some of the information you may already know, but the goal is to help you make better decisions if you choose to use speed or if you need resources to quit.

Copies of this brochure can be picked up at multiple locations where gay, bi and trans men gather, as well as the STOP AIDS Project at 207 Sanchez Street at Market or at SF City Clinic at 356 7th Street (between Folsom and Harrison). The brochure is also available to download at www.stopaids.org > resources > substance use.

Can You Talk About Sex?

We are on the hunt for local guys who can talk about SEX and are interesting in volunteering a few hours a month!

If you have an interest in working along side our team in preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases, we will provide all the training you need!

The time commitment is minimal, between 5 - 8 hours per month. It requires no special skills or knowledge except your interest and time.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Frank by email at frank.strona@sfdph.org for more information.

APRIL IS STD AWARENESS MONTH



Photo Credit: Brian Mills, Titan Media

Come on Guys,
If You Use It, Test It!

--Travis Creston
Mr. San Francisco Leather, 2007

FREE APRIL TESTING EVENTS

April 12th, 2007 (3p – 8p)

2278 Market Street,

(the former Tower Records Store)

With Special Guests:

Energy 92.7 Radio Personalities:

Greg & Fernando

We will be offering syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, HIV testing & counseling.

*Plus we will be offering a Raffle,
Music, Snacks & More...*

Other FREE April testing sites:

April 5 – Gold's Gym Castro Testing (1p-4p)

*April 16 – In the Castro near the 440 Club (9p-12a)
(Look for the Stop AIDS Project's Mobile RV!)*

April 20 – At the Powerhouse bar (10p-1a)

*April 28 – At Mack Folsom Prison (10p-1a)
(Look for the Stop AIDS Project's Mobile RV!)*

Call (415) 355-2009 For Additional Locations



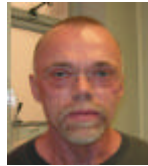
DO THE RIGHT THING

Partner Notification and Referral Services

A new study out of McGill University found that half of all new HIV infections are the result of newly infected people not knowing they're carrying the virus, inadvertently infecting their sexual partners. Eight Montreal HIV clinics were followed for over eight years sampling 2,500 patients. Findings demonstrated that newly infected patients were eight times more likely to transmit the virus than those in the chronic stage of HIV disease given the same behavior. Dr. Mark Wainberg, Director of the McGill AIDS Center and lead author Dr. Bluma Brenner of the McGill Faculty of Medicine and the Jewish General Hospital, presented these research findings at the AIDS Conference in Los Angeles, March 1, 2007.

It's alarming to consider people in such a highly infectious state who completely lack awareness of what's happening in their bodies. As public health workers, we have our work cut out for us, locating, informing and testing partners of patients newly identified as HIV positive. My primary role with the San Francisco Department of Public Health is in Partner Counseling and Referral Services (PCRS). When I first heard about using this syphilis model of partner elicitation and notification for HIV, I was immediately on board. I feel such a program is long past due. Getting other agencies on board is an ongoing struggle and perhaps in need of some serious campaigning. The most useful aspect of PCRS is what is called anonymous, 3rd party disclosure. This allows for a newly diagnosed person to give names and contact information to a health specialist, such as myself, who then can contact partners, advising them that someone they've had sex with tested positive for HIV. We can then offer them rapid antibody and RNA testing. The name of the original patient remains confidential and the contact has invaluable information about his or her health. If patients were forthcoming with partner information, we could dramatically reduce infection rates of HIV. This tool allows for a newly infected person to do the right thing, while not having to deal with negative ramifications. Often fear, shame or indifference will adversely influence timely disclosure and in some cases preclude disclosure altogether. PCRS is a voluntary program that we can all benefit from. This requires a well-informed public. We need to get the word out.

Mac McMaster
Community Health Specialist
SF City Clinic



DROP-IN & TALK

The *Life After Meth* is a peer-based support group for gay and bisexual men to safely talk about topics important to remaining abstinent from, or reducing their use of crystal methamphetamine.

Not affiliated with any particular method of treatment, treatment resources are available upon request.

Discussion topics are determined based on a combination of the current issues of the participants and common issues dealt with by newly "clean" men (e.g. socializing without 'partying', sex without meth, job hunting, defining and reaching short and long term goals, etc).

The *Life After Meth* group takes place the first and third Fridays of every month. For more information contact Brandon Ivory at 415.846.5726 or by email at brandon.ivory@sfdph.org.

Positive Reinforcement Opportunity Project

Are you interested in a new way to quit the use of Crystal Meth, but need a little help? The Positive Reinforcement Opportunity Project (PROP) may be the solution for you. For more information contact David Pasol by phone: 415-740-6273, or by email: dpasol@waldenhouse.org or visit us at www.PROPsf.org



Community Partnership on Gay Men's Health

On February 5th, the HIV Prevention Section (HPS) of the AIDS Office at DPH held the day long "Community Partnership on Gay Men's Health". The purpose of the summit was to identify the gay men's communities priority issues concerning our health and well being, begin to strategize innovative approaches and solutions and start developing productive partnerships between community health activists, our network of providers and the different branches within the Department of Public Health. Two thirds of the men in attendance were interested activists in the community. The participants identified five main health issues to focus on: addiction, aging, community development, mental health and sexuality. For each of these, working groups identified challenges, best practices, barriers and potential solutions. HPS is going to organize working groups of members from the community and agencies as well as the different branches of DPH with the goal of better integration of the health department's various programming on all aspects of gay men's health. It's our hope that community members and providers are equal partners in this process. For more information or to participate in the future please contact Doug Sebesta at douglas.sebesta@sfdph.org or call 415-554-9031.

You always have choices when it comes to your sexual health; **STDtest.org** to register for a free syphilis test at a local lab & **inSPOT.org** to let your partners know when you have been infected with an STD.



Community Involvement: Energy 92.7

At Energy 92.7 we believe it's our *responsibility* to give back and support the communities in which we serve. Unlike television, radio is a very personal medium. People don't have an affinity for a television channel, but they do for a radio station. Typically it's not the music that makes people "adopt" a radio station, rather it's what happens in between the songs – it's the *personality* of the radio station.

This includes its' DJs, imaging, events, promotions, commercials and its' efforts to give back to the causes that their audience gives a damn about.

In our case, a significant portion of our audience is the LGBT community, and therefore we care about the issues that face this community. As a result, we support the people, organizations, events, etc

that surround the LGBT community. And we do so 365 days a year. If you don't make it a consistent effort, well then you're just faking it. Grass roots community involvement, fundraising and giving back are staples of Energy 92.7's brand. That's just the way it is for us.

Share
Grow
Learn
Teach
CONNECT

www.HIVConnect.net

The place where the community comes together

You can also tune in to 92.7 by visiting www.energy927fm.com

For Immediate Release: New website launched as Social Network for HIV/AIDS Community

HIVConnect.net (www.HIVConnect.net), the latest project by former Manhunt general manager, Stephan Adelson, is a place of free dialogue for people with HIV/AIDS, Community Based Organizations, AIDS Service Organizations, researchers and others in the community.

Launched on March 1st, HIVConnect.net is a unique site that connects all sectors of the HIV/AIDS community. Adelson is using his experience with online communities and funneling his energy into a full-functioning social network for the HIV/AIDS community. HIVConnect.net is a place for organizations to link with their clients on-line and their clients to link together, bringing the concept of a local "drop in center" to the internet.

"My goal is to create an environment of comfort, and deepen the social interaction between clients and the various organizations and individuals that seek to support them," said Adelson.

HIVConnect.net includes a place for member profiles while offering a comprehensive library with topics from "co-infections" to "Issues for Native Americans." Members are invited to post articles and comment on ones currently posted.

There are three types of membership available on the site. One profile type is for those that are HIV-positive, a second for organizations, and a third for friends and family members. To ensure the privacy and comfort HIV-positive members family and friend profiles do not have access to the HIV-positive community.

Long term survivors of HIV/AIDS are becoming isolated environments, where medication and mutations of the virus are creating distinctive responses in individuals. Their doctors often face unique situations, yet sharing these experiences is often difficult and time prohibitive.

HIVConnect.net provides a place for authentic communication while ensuring the privacy of the individual. To further assure privacy no identifying personal information such as name or address is collected.

Those that are newly diagnosed HIV-positive today have a completely different experience from those that were diagnosed over 20 years ago. It is imperative that the stories and experiences of the long term survivors are preserved and shared with this new generation.



HIVConnect.net hopes to make life easier for all who are affected by HIV/AIDS while educating those that seek to support them.

For more info, call 617-953-9366 and log onto www.hivconnect.net

Your Sexual Health is a periodic newsletter designed to promote routine sexual health and wellness. If you would like a copy sent to you by email or would like additional copies for distribution, please contact Frank Strona at Frank.Strona@sfdph.org