

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CVIII, Number 102, 11 April 1984 — Impact of AIDS addressed by panel [ARTICLE]

## Impact of AIDS addressed by panel

By SHELLY BRANCH

The medical and social implications of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were addressed last night in a panel discussion at Hamilton Hall entitled "Not for Gay Men Only—An Open Forum on AIDS."

Richard Berkowitz, an AIDS victim and a founding member of People With AIDS discussed AIDS on a more personal level with the audience of 40. "AIDS dominates most of my life," he said and described his experience as a "rollercoaster of confusion."

Berkowitz claimed, "I believe my being gay has nothing to do with my getting AIDS." Instead, Berkowitz said he believes

that his sexual promiscuity and "life in the fast lane" led to his affliction with the disease.

Berkowitz, 26, said he has had sexual relations with over 3,000 men. "If I had learned to modify my sexual activity, I could have protected my health."

In his discussion of some medical aspects of the disease, Dr. Joseph Sonnabend of the AIDS Medical Foundation, described explanations of AIDS as "quite varied," and discussed some false assumptions about the disease, such as it can develop from swollen lymph glands.

"Risk group designations are one of the most socially damaging aspects of the

disease," he insisted, citing homosexuals, Haitians, and blood recipients as the most frequently recognized groups.

Risk groups "assume that the disease is spread within the group—this isn't true at all," he said. "One really has to ask which homosexual man gets the disease."

Don Des Jarlais, Ph.D, of the New York State Division of Substance Control Services, pointed out the high percentage of AIDS victims among both straight and homosexual intravenous drug users, citing the New York and tri-state area as havens for the disease. "Something is being spread around New York that hasn't gotten out to San Francisco in large numbers," said Des Jarlais, offering needle-sharing as a possible cause.

Social problems of homosexual AIDS patients were outlined by Lori Weiner, and AIDS social worker at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. "Anxiety, fear, and confusion," are patients' first feelings after having been diagnosed as having AIDS, Weiner said, because "this is a disease which is not only life threatening, but contagious."

Among the continual difficulties faced by AIDS patients are "social rejection and fear of isolation," said Weiner, who addressed the problem of what to do if a friend has AIDS. "Encourage communication. Be open to expressions of hope," she advised.

In addition to disclosing his experiences as an AIDS patient, Berkowitz urged members of the

gay community to understand the consequences of sexual promiscuity and to educate others on the facts about AIDS.

“AIDS is not spread by casual contact,” he emphasized, concluding on a note of optimism: “Some encouraging things are happening—more men realize that a diagnosis of AIDS need not be a death sentence.”