

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Spectator Spectrum

Editorial

AIDS and Columbia

There are 4,000 cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in New York City. Columbia is in New York City and has a large gay population. Yet, with the exception of the Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance (CGLA) the University has been virtually silent on the matter.

AIDS is a tragic disease that makes for upsetting conversation. It is one hundred times more tragic once you know something about it and meet the people who have been stricken by it. But the Columbia community must not let the upsetting nature of the disease stop it from educating itself about it.

A little research shows that there are resources on campus for members of the Columbia community who have AIDS or who just want to talk about it. But these resources have not been well-publicized.

Laura Pinsky at the University Health Services is an AIDS counselor. Anyone can make an appointment to talk to her in confidence. In addition, the Health Services has the latest information on the disease. CGLA also has information on AIDS, now the leading killer of young men in New York City.

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But the tragedy of AIDS extends beyond those who suffer from it. It is the ignorance about the disease, and the irrational fears that are the result of ignorance. While much about the virus remains a mystery to scientists, they do know that AIDS cannot be contracted by casual contact.

Ignorance and fears about AIDS means that it is imperative that Columbia do more to distribute information about AIDS and provide support groups and or references for AIDS patients. It also provides an opportunity for University administrators to strengthen their relationship with the Columbia gay community.

Dean of Columbia College Robert Pollack, Senior Vice President Joseph Mullinix, Dean of Students Roger Lehecka and Dr. Richard Carlson, director of health services, are to meet next week to develop a "University policy" on AIDS. The idea for a coordinated effort is a good one and is overdue. The best policy, however, will result from a meeting that includes not just administrators but the CGLA, and individuals from the infectious disease department at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

When the director of health services can say "I've never seen, spoken or consulted with anyone on this campus with AIDS," while other University officials claim they know of at least several cases, there is simply not enough coordination and communication.

Let's not wait until more people in the Columbia community have AIDS or know others who have AIDS. That is an awful way to have to learn about it.

Editorials are passed by a two-thirds majority of the managing board.