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Forum informs CU women on AIDS concerns

By CHRISTINE TAN

Women can help protect themselves against AIDS by insisting that their sexual partners use condoms, Laura Pinsky of Columbia's Office of Health Education and Gay Health Advocacy told students last night.

Six women discussed their attitudes toward AIDS and the negative associations many men have about the use of condoms at a forum on "Women and AIDS" sponsored by the Columbia College Women's Center.

Margaret McCarthy, Law '90, distributed condoms to the women present to familiarize the students with their use as a means of lessening the possibility of contracting sexually-transmitted diseases.

As well as reducing the risk of being infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, condoms protect against chlamydia, a type of venereal disease, and against venereal warts, which Pinsky said are "virtually all over this campus."

While Pinsky emphasized that condoms greatly reduce the risk of being infected with HIV, the students said they feel many view condoms as

a "back seat" form of birth control.

According to the students, men see condoms as "like a bag" and their use "like taking a shower with a raincoat on."

But Pinsky maintained it is crucial that women learn about the sexual histories of their prospective partners and use condoms if they have any uncertainty about such histories.

"It's obviously hard to ask a guy 'have you ever been a receptive partner in anal intercourse,'" Pinsky said.

According to Pinsky, the bottom line is how much risk one is willing to take. "If you can't ask his sexual history, use a condom," she said, emphasizing that the danger of contracting AIDS is especially high in New York where one third of all AIDS cases have occurred.

Pinsky advocated condoms for all acts of sexual intercourse regardless of the participants' sexual history to guard against other sexually transmitted diseases.

Pinsky advised women to carry condoms with them and to get over any fear of purchasing them. "It's like getting over buying Tampax when you're 13," she said.

Pinsky is currently working with the Gay Health Advocacy to make free condoms available to students on campus.