

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CX, Number 107, 4 April 1986 — Gay Pride Week will provide health information [ARTICLE]

Gay Pride Week will provide health information

By JONATHAN GILL

Tonight marks the beginning of "Gay Pride Week," a series of lectures, dances and films, including one showing explicit footage of safe sex techniques.

The program, sponsored by the Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance (CGLA), is designed to promote unity within Columbia's gay community and disseminate information about AIDS. The week marks CGLA's 19th anniversary.

"We are hoping to reinforce our own belief in being gay," said Frank Elsea, CC '86 and President of CGLA. "We also want to show people who are coming to terms with being gay—that it's not so bad."

As part of the week, CGLA, the Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP) and Columbia University Health Services will co-sponsor a Safer Sex Workshop Tuesday evening, to help gay and bisexual men understand and explore safe sex practices.

At the workshop, portions of the film "Lifeguard," produced by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and showing footage of safe sex techniques, will be shown and followed by group discussions.

"Talking about safe sex tends to be a taboo in the gay community. We're trying to eroticize safe sex," said Michael

Dowling, a graduate student in the School of Public Health and GHAP member. "There should be no reason for any controversy."

Richard Carlson, director of University Health Services, said he supports the film's use in the workshop, although he himself has not seen it. "I am aware of the care that went into planning the program. The idea of safe sex is important, and it's also important that safe sex doesn't have to be dull or non-erotic."

"The use of the film, within the context of the workshop, can be quite helpful," he said.

"We're not looking to make controversy," said Laura Pinsky, a therapist in the Mental Health Division of Columbia University Health Services and Co-coordinator of GHAP. "We think it's going to be useful educationally, and we assume the community could accept it."

The week will also include a screening of a documentary about the modern gay rights movement, "Before Stonewall," a lecture by New York's Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore, a dance, a brunch and a party.

Pinsky emphasized the connection between the emotional unity of the gay community and its changing behavior in reaction to AIDS.

"Gay pride in a way is a health issue," she said. "There is ample evidence that gay and bisexual men who are comfortable with their sexuality and feel part of a community are best equipped to protect and maintain their own health."

Although National Gay pride week is annually held in June, CGLA holds Columbia Gay Pride week in April in order to involve the school-year population.