

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## Students voice AIDS fears

By JONATHAN GILL

Seventeen students met to discuss their concerns about AIDS last night in a forum sponsored by the Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP).

Led by Michael Dowling, co-coordinator of GHAP and a student in the school of Public Health, the forum consisted of a 30 minute presentation on the personal and societal implications of AIDS, as well as the current state of AIDS research. Afterwards, peer counselors led small group discussions for students to share their fears and concerns about the disease.

During his presentation, Dowling emphasized the need for ready access to accurate information concerning AIDS. "Since the history of AIDS begins only in 1981, compiling statistics is problematic. And much information is subject to some interpretation," he said.

Dowling also cited the statistic that AIDS is presently the fourth largest premature killer of men and sixth

largest of women in New York City. By the end of 1986, he continued, it would be the tenth largest premature killer of men and women nationwide. "The U.S. Government predicts a vaccine for AIDS by 1990, but that seems a bit far-fetched," he said.

The coordinators of GHAP declined to let Spectator reporters attend the small group discussions, citing reasons of confidentiality.

"People were able to share their feelings," said one group leader, David Usman, a student in the Columbia School of Social Work. "One of the groups had both gay and straight men and one straight woman. It was beneficial for everyone concerned."

"It went marvelously well," said Dowling. "We didn't know what kind of response we would get, but it turned out very well. People were a little tense at first talking in front of strangers, but they ended up talking about how AIDS had affected their lives. We had been worried about having both gays and straights together, but it just wasn't a problem. Both gays and straights were dealing with emotional issues involving a terminal illness, the fear of catching it, and ways to deal with that fear."

GHAP will be holding monthly forums in order to attract more people for longer discussions, Dowling said. GHAP also plans to institute a speaker bureau for larger presentations with question and answer periods, as well as one-on-one counseling services for students concerned about AIDS.