

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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NIH's slow AIDS research blasted

By Maria Vardis

Claiming that the National Institute of Health (NIH) has not been effectively researching drug treatment for AIDS patients, members of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP) protested on Low Plaza yesterday afternoon.

“NIH, you can't hide. We charge you with genocide,” shouted protestors, while inside Low Library, University officials were honoring the centennial of the NIH.

“The NIH is treating us [AIDS patients] like a measles epidemic,” said Frank Smithson, a member of ACTUP. “They're dragging their feet, mainly.”

According to protestors, the NIH is providing AIDS patients with the drug AZT to the exclusion of other potentially life-saving drugs.

“In the AIDS Treatment Evaluation Units [ATEU, medical centers funded by the NIH,] 90 percent of their trials use AZT. That’s fine, except literally half of the people who have AIDS cannot take AZT because it’s too toxic,” said David Robinson, an ACTUP member.

AZT is a potentially fatal drug.

“Other drugs have shown anecdotally to do good things. AZT is a drug so toxic that you wouldn’t use it on anyone unless they were almost dead,” said Rick Shur, CC ’75, and founder of Gay Alums.

Protestors claim that the NIH has also been mismanaging funds. “In June 1986 Congress allocated \$47 million just for testing new drugs,” said Shur. “One thing that they say is that there is a lot of red tape and lack of office space, and that the pharmaceutical companies are not complying and helping out,” he added.

According to Shur, 6,000 people should have been enrolled in ATEU trials already, but fewer than 850 people are actually enrolled presently.

However, some disagreed with ACTUP’s assertions. “NIH is not the problem. They don’t have the budget,” said Tom Norris, President of Presbyterian Hospital. “It’s an issue of public awareness. If the public and the Congress would appreciate the problem there would be more funding.”

Both demonstrators and on-lookers

agreed that AIDS research is an urgent matter.

“It [the demonstration] is legitimate. It is something that should be addressed. I’m not sure about all the red tape, but there probably is a lot of red tape, knowing the government,” said Al Burs, CC ’87.

“I think that things like this make people talk. It forces you to think about things. I think that’s good,” said Tudor Tien, CC ’87.

According to Dominic Moro, Director of Security, the large number of personnel at the protest were not anticipating any problems from the protestors, but were concerned about protecting demonstrators from anti-homosexuals.

Asha Badrinath, Duchesne Drew, and Maria Nieves also helped to report this story.