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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

AIDS committee to unveil policy this week

By Jenny Bower

After a year-long delay, the University AIDS committee will release this week a uniform policy on the treatment of Columbia affiliates afflicted with AIDS.

The policy recommendation is currently being sent to committee members for final approval, according to committee chair and Senior Vice President Joe Mullinix.

Mullinix said he is optimistic the AIDS report will receive the support of a majority of committee members, despite past disagreements on the wording of the policy.

In November, Mullinix said if necessary, he was prepared to issue a dissenting report, to prevent the approval process from dragging on too long. The committee was first convened in 1985.

The foundation of the AIDS committee's policy is that AIDS is a disease not transmitted through casual contact, qualifying it as a physical handicap, committee members said.

Columbia affiliates infected with AIDS will be accorded the same rights as a handicapped person under the policy, according to committee

member and Director of University Health Services Richard Carlson.

Presently, the tacit policy of the University is prevention of discrimination against Columbia employees and students who have AIDS, in areas such as housing, employment, admission, and readmission. According to Carlson this policy will continue, and will not be changed with the new report.

He emphasized that the protection of AIDS victims' rights is one of the main issues of the epidemic.

"This is a concern of people on campus not infected with the HIV virus (AIDS), and a concern of those who are infected," Carlson said.

The policy is "flexible", since the University may review the status of individual cases, Carlson said. In extreme cases, it is possible a person with AIDS could be asked to leave the University community, in which case they would have the right to appeal a decision through the administration or their union, he added.

"If a person were physically incapacitated [by AIDS] and it was clear that that person was physically incapable of carrying on his duties, we might have to ask that person to leave [the school]," Mullinix agreed.

Mullinix added that the University is not contemplating such action at this point, but such cases may

arise, requiring special measures.

Paul Douglas, a committee member and coordinator of the Gay Health Advocacy Project [GHAP], said the University will not, as a matter of course, investigate individual people afflicted with AIDS, but will review their status if they have problems doing their job.

According to federal law, employers are obliged to go to reasonable lengths to make it possible for diseased or handicapped employees to continue working. The University will follow these provisions as outlined in the report, Douglas said.

Mullinix explained that much of the delay in the issuing of the report was due to dispute over language. "What appears so straight forward isn't so when you look at the language," he said.

The argument surfaced largely between the gay rights advocates and lawyers on the committee, Mullinix said.

The legal contingent of the committee was in favor of a non-specific policy that allowed Columbia flexibility in deciding if an AIDS victim could remain at the University, according to Douglas.

"The problem is that on one side you have a pressure for explicit protection for a class, and on the other side you have legal or extra-legal pressure of not specifying policies," he said.

Carlson agreed that University lawyers on the committee were against a very restrictive policy.

"We don't know what is going to happen two, three, four years down the road in terms of this infection. I think that a policy that says we'll never treat someone who has this infec-

tion anyway differently is boxing yourself in," Carlson said.

Douglas has condemned some committee members for holding up what he termed "the primary and important goal of the group."

"Freedom of the University to act as it needs is something they care about enough that they are willing to make all sorts of bizarre legal arguments about," Douglas said. "For the University sophists, the real motivation is they want freedom of action and accountability."

According to Mullinix, rigid statements in the policy caused problems. He believes the low level of detail in the policy to be the wisdom of its approach, explaining, "the greatest ideas are the simple ones."

Mullinix said he was surprised that at the committee's most recent meeting in mid-January, most of the problems were resolved.

Mullinix asked committee members to get back to him with any problems they have concerning the specifics of the report. As of last week he said he had not heard from anyone.

The report will be publicly issued early this week, Mullinix said, at which time he said he plans to discuss the policy with other Univer-

sity administrators. Barring any substantial problems or objections, it will be implemented as University policy, he added.

Roderick Dial, co-chair of the Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance, said he believes the report to be reasonable, but accuses it of simply restating what is currently New York State law.

Dial said, "It seems kind of ludicrous to take such a long time to say what we are going to do is obey the law."

Dial also criticized the amount of flexibility the policy gives the University, and any possibility of an AIDS victim being expelled or fired.

Dial said, "No matter how unlikely (expulsion) is, is not the point. It's the principle of the thing that needs to be protected. It doesn't make me feel better no matter how unlikely it is."

He said he wants clarified "once and for all what laws Columbia is obliged to follow."

Douglas said, however, that the policy recommendation was strong in its protection of the rights of AIDS victims.

"Basically, we feel like it's excellent pro-

tection against harassment," he said.

In a November interview, Douglas said GHAP would agree to a policy recommendation stating that "the University does not discriminate against those who have AIDS or who are perceived to have AIDS, and does not tolerate discrimination against those persons."

Douglas said of the final policy recommendation "It's not Flaubert. It's not gorgons prose, but it says lots of good things."

Committee members would not specify the actual wording of the policy.

The University AIDS Committee will not go out of business with the completion of its report, according to Carlson. The committee will remain as a body to which people can appeal and which will review AIDS related situations in the future, he said.

While the committee has been busy writing the Policy, according to Douglas, other concerns have been neglected. Douglas said he would like to see the group deal with issues such as extra funding for University Health Services' and GHAP's AIDS prevention programs, insurance issues, and more specific anti-discrimination policies.



SPECTATOR/ANDREW HILL

THE BLOB: Is it an aardvark's cell, modern art, or just a chunk of ice? You guess.