

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Barnard AIDS workshops halted by administration

By Robyn Pforr

Barnard College has imposed a moratorium on the activities of the Barnard AIDS Peer Educators, until the group agrees to supervision by Barnard Health Services.

Kathryn Rodgers, general counsel and vice president of Barnard College ordered on October 20 that the group stop its AIDS workshops.

In a memo, Rodgers wrote that groups distributing medical information must be supervised by health services.

“We can’t have an unsupervised group giving out information about something as serious as AIDS. Should an issue arise, who is the per-

son to determine how it is presented? The information should be given by doctors, not undergraduates,” said Rodgers, hastening to add that students are critical to the educational program.

Members of the student group insist, however, that they are trained and continuously updated by AIDS experts who are more knowledgeable about the disease than health service representatives.

The administration chose to impose a moratorium because, according to Rodgers, “this group was just going ahead on its own and

avoiding coming in and talking to us. What we have to do is get together and talk about what the curriculum is going to be.”

Ruth Sarfaty, Barnard director of Public Relations, said, “The reason for the moratorium is that this group was dispensing medical advice and medical counseling very much out there on their own. This very small group had decided that they were more equipped to deal with the issues than health services.”

The AIDS Peer Educators say they have an extensive network from which they are constantly gathering new information about AIDS as it becomes available. Among their advisory board members are Laura Pinsky, director of the Gay Health Advocacy Project, Columbia University, and author of **The Essential AIDS Fact Book** and Marc Osfield, M.S., a health educator of New York University and member of the American College Health Association Task Force on AIDS.

In addition, two of the AIDS peer educators, Pamela Mund, BC '89, and Leslie Kantor, BC '89, are currently interning in the AIDS Program Services division of the New York City Department of Health, where they have access to the most up-to-date information about the disease, Kantor said.

Referring to the memo released by Rodgers, Mund asked, “What does medical information mean? It is a very vague term. Does that include all health-related issues?”

In a press release prepared by three students peer educators the group states, “This action [the moratorium] leaves Barnard without any active AIDS education program. The AIDS peer educators are concerned about the interruption in the dissemination of information about a health issue that the U.S. Public Health Service has labeled an “epidemic.”

The AIDS peer educator group, currently composed of twelve peer educators along with an advisory board of AIDS educators, was established last fall with the involvement of Dr. Harriet Mogul, head of Barnard Health Services. The group worked with health ser-

vices until this September, at which time they became an independent student group.

According to Mund, the group's members decided to become independent of Barnard Health Service because of differences over curricula and disagreements over who should give the presentations.

"The question is who in the college's eye is best suited to take responsibility for the accuracy of medical information. The responsibility resides with medical people. It cannot reside appropriately with students," asserted Mogul, who says that a number of faculty and consulting faculty of health services were concerned with the nature of the education transmitted by the group, judging it oversimplified and outdated.

Having read the group's manual, written by Osfield and Kantor, Mogul concludes, "There

is a conspicuous absence of the information of the newer articles and public health recommendations. They neglect the latest research findings, particularly in reference to women." Mogul said she has never attended one of the group's presentations.

Mogul offered as an example what she said was the group's promotion of the use of condoms.

"The focus of their program has been that condom usage is safe sex and it has gotten a whole lot more complicated than that. It's much harder than just how to unroll a condom. We need to go beyond simple messages," explained Mogul, referring to recent articles in medical journals that have cast doubt on the efficacy of condoms as a barrier to AIDS infection.

Osfield, however, questioned the ability of Health Services to provide accurate, up-to-date information. "I'd be surprised if Barnard Health Services is in the forefront of AIDS research, unless Barnard is conducting its own research. I don't understand why all of a sudden they feel they have a monopoly on the research information," said Osfield. "The research is available.

"I have read with interest the findings of

"I have worked with a number of college groups nationwide and this is by far the best group. In terms of their commitment, their talent, and their energy level, I have been very impressed," Osfield added.

Since the moratorium, three workshops planned for the Brooks-Hewitt-Reid-Centennial complex have been cancelled. The group's presentations this fall have included a discussion of the terms involved with AIDS, a summary of the epidemiological updates, how the disease is transmitted, the range of high to low risk behaviors, and the legal, social and ethical issues involved.

The students say they have not ruled out a program in cooperation with Health Services, providing that certain conditions are met. Primarily, they want to have final say over who becomes a member of the group and some voice in deciding what goes into the curriculum and how it is presented, according to peer educator Beth Klement, CC '90.

"I would not go back to Health Services if we do not have a voice in the curriculum. I feel this kind of interruption [in the peer education] is abominable," Klement said.

"I thought their [the peer educators] approach was very good, very valuable. I've listened to their presentations at least three times and I learned something new," said Julie Berman, BC '89, a residence counselor in Reid on whose floor the group gave a presentation. Says Susan Lane, BC '90, a residence assistant, "I was very impressed by their professionalism. If Barnard Health Services does not form a comparable group and the student-run group is not allowed to continue—the AIDS education is very important—and that is what will be missed."



SPECTATOR/JULIE BERMAN

OUR LIPS OUR SEALED: Barnard imposed a moratorium on the Aids Peer Educators, prohibiting the group's workshops.