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Barnard students concerned about AIDS

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About half of the students who responded to a survey about Barnard Health Services said they did not believe AIDS received enough attention as a women's health issue.

About 10 percent of the 2,170 students to whom the survey was distributed responded to questions asking them to rate the importance of particular women's health issues.

The survey included questions about the possibility of implementing H.I.V. testing at Barnard. Currently, on-campus H.I.V. testing is only available through Columbia Health Services.

One third of the respondents said they were considering taking a test to determine if they are infected with the H.I.V. virus.

The study, conducted by the Barnard Student Health Services, the Student Government Association, and the Class of 1994, was the brainchild of Alysia Kwon, BC '94, the president of her class.

Kwon said she was concerned about the apparent lack of attention that Barnard Health Services was giving to AIDS as a women's health issue.

"Basically my friends and I were

starting to talk about it. Some people I've talked to were very irate about the absence of an H.I.V. testing program at Barnard," Kwon said.

Polly Wheat, director of Barnard Health Services, said students do not know about the services provided by Columbia Health Services.

"Certainly half of the students believe that AIDS does not receive enough attention as a women's health issue at Barnard. Sixty percent aren't even aware that free confidential testing is available at Columbia," Wheat said. "This is one of the reasons why we didn't duplicate the services across the street."

Some students said Barnard, as well as Columbia, should provide an H.I.V. testing program for its students.

"I think that it's a really important service that Barnard should provide," said Alex Schatzow, BC '94.

"Part of the reason that many of the people don't know about the testing at Columbia is because it isn't at Barnard. There's something more reassuring about being tested by women. It's a scary thing," Schatzow said.

The results of the study also indicated that the respondents believed violence, AIDS, alcohol use, smoking, and reproductive issues were

the issues most relevant to women's health.

Clinical care, contraceptive counseling, routine gynecological examinations, and H.I.V. testing were rated as the most important services that Barnard Health Services should provide.

Although AIDS is now the leading cause of death for women in New York City under the age of 35, smoking is a much greater long-term health risk, Wheat said, adding that she is concerned that smoking cessation counseling was given low priority by the respondents of the survey.

"Smoking causes far greater deaths in women than H.I.V. The largest growing group of new smokers is young women. Other women's health issues pose even greater reasons for concern than AIDS," Wheat said.

Barnard administrators are not planning to establish an H.I.V. testing program this year, but may consider it in the future, according to Wheat.

In the meantime, Barnard Health Services personnel will work with Students Providing Education and Counseling About H.I.V., a Barnard student group, to increase campus awareness about AIDS and the programs available to students.