

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Will Hughes' concise and rather expert history of the upstart of the AIDS virus and its early manifestations at Columbia, "Fight On: The Story of AIDS at Columbia," is to be commended—but as a resident advocate for the Gay Health Advocacy Project, Hughes entangles himself in a conflict of interest when detailing the AIDS experience at today's Columbia, and so oversteps his bounds.

The emergent message of the piece for me and other Columbia MSMs is that someone we know holds one of the few keys we have for on-campus testing. That someone is going to walk around campus with the knowledge of our HIV status in his head, and not only that, but he'll also be theorizing and reframing our health for his own ends.

The "peer" aspect of GHAP is a vestige of an older, scarier HIV era. As a gay man living in a city where contracting HIV is a real and present fear, I want to know my status with no stipulations. I want it anonymous, confidential, and administered by a health professional. That's all. The other

bridges, like who should know and how I should tell them, those I'll cross when I come to them—and on my terms.

That Columbia lets students administer HIV tests is frankly ridiculous.

If you take heart that a group of people will be around to support you the moment you test positive—great, GHAP's done its job. But if you are like me and squirm even thinking about seeing someone you know in the doctor's office, if you think you'll need time alone to process the massive change in your life, or if you just want a greater degree of freedom and choice in determining your response to your own health—I want you to know that you are not locked into this smiley-face hegemonic vision of Columbia HIV support and that more and varied resources exist all over the city.

They're but a few Google searches away, and they don't come prepackaged with your "peers."

—Allen Johnson