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Columbia Gay Health Advocacy Project  
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ABSTRACT

The Columbia Gay Health Advocacy Project provides AIDS education and counseling to Columbia University students (primarily adolescents and young adults), faculty and staff. Its goals are (1) to increase knowledge of AIDS so that risk reduction behaviors are adopted and (2) to reduce unnecessary fear of transmission through casual contact in order to alleviate anxiety and lessen discrimination against risk group members.

The project is staffed by volunteer peer counselors - who are risk group members - with supervision by a professional psychotherapist. Services are directed toward all members of the University community, gay and straight, male and female with special emphasis on the needs of risk group members. Methods used include distribution of written material, lectures, workshops, and individual peer and professional counseling. The project also serves in an advisory role to the student health service and University administration. Counselor training is extensive and there is consultation with medical experts and ongoing review of scientific literature. An effort is being made to integrate the advantages of peer counseling and professional therapeutic services where necessary. The project seeks to assess and meet the special educational needs of a target population of adolescents and young adults who may present certain specific resistances to AIDS education (e.g. anxiety regarding sexuality, impulsivity, difficulty in recognizing long-term consequences of current behavior).

A research protocol is being developed to assess the role of gay people who are not health professionals in providing services to "the worried well" (i.e. undiagnosed risk group members).

Columbia Gay Health Advocacy Project is seeking to develop a model of AIDS education which will effectively reach a University population with highly accurate information and take into account complex and subtle social and psychological needs. The model is being shared with other universities, particularly through a series of workshops to be held at a major gay and lesbian student conference in the Spring of 1987.