

TALKING TO AFRICAN AMERICANS ABOUT HIV AND AIDS

By Angela Mitchell

Since Magic Johnson's announcement last November that he is HIV-positive, African Americans have become slightly more comfortable talking about AIDS and responsible sexual behavior. But only slightly. Despite the fact that close to 30% of Americans with AIDS are black and that 52% of American women with AIDS are black, the black community has been slow to wake up to the realities of AIDS.

Though images in the popular media might make you think otherwise, the black community is one steeped in conservative religious and social traditions. Some of these traditions have changed with the times. But vestiges of this conservatism linger in such forms as the denial of the existence of a black gay community; the reluctance to discuss sexual matters openly; and the prohibition against "put-

ting your business out in the street," or talking about personal or family concerns with people outside of the family.

Homophobia is strong in the black community, where heterosexual masculinity is prized. A survey of 900 black men conducted by the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, an arm of the National Association of Black and White Men Together, found that although 74% of the black men surveyed were willing to identify as gay privately, only 48% would do so publicly.

This fear makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for black men to live openly gay lives. Some are married and live ostensibly straight lives, but secretly have sex with men. These men are not likely to acknowledge that they are at high risk for contracting HIV and passing it to their partners, who in such cases may be an unsuspecting wife who wouldn't think

to ask her husband to wear a condom.

Reaching such men is extremely difficult, since they rarely make themselves known. One

boy learns early that one sure way to get respect from other boys is to rack up a long list of girls they've slept with.

Black IV drug users pose a

disease" but a serious health concern for heterosexuals as well.

Most black AIDS educators find that the most effective way to disseminate AIDS information to blacks is through one-on-one and small group counseling. Conducting workshops, wherever there's a black audience, (churches, youth groups, schools, etc.) on how to bring up sensitive issues like condom use, sexual histories, drug use, and transmission of STD's is an effective first step in getting people to learn more about AIDS and its prevention.

Organizations like Philadelphia's BEBASHI (Blacks Educating Blacks About Sexual Health Issues) have found that simply hitting the pavement and talking to people in a friendly, relaxed way is very effective in getting blacks involved in AIDS

education efforts.

AIDS education in the African-American community is a challenge, but one that is gradually being addressed and met. Perhaps a sign of this slow shift is the recent popularity of "Let's Talk About Sex," a song by female rap group Salt-n-Pepa. And even hyper-macho groups like Bell, Biv, Devoe have worked condom usage into their lyrics.

Many large and small cities in the U.S. now have organizations devoted to AIDS education and prevention among blacks. There is still much to be done, but there is hope.

Angela Mitchell is a free lance writer and contributing editor for EMERGE magazine in New York City. If you or an organization in your community would like more information about HIV/AIDS services call: BLACKS AGAINST AIDS, Atlantic City, NJ 609/3471645.

HEALTH

effective way is through confidential hotlines, like the one run by STOP AIDS CHICAGO where callers need not be afraid of being found out.

In heterosexual relationships, black women often find it difficult to ask their partners about their sexual histories. A woman who talks too knowledgeably about sex may be seen as forward. And asking a man to wear a condom is a worse offense, that implies he isn't to be trusted.

Black mothers often tell their daughters to "keep their legs closed and their skirts down" but don't tell them what can happen if they don't. And young black

different problem for the community. Drug users of any type are seen more as pariahs and less as people with a problem. Programs that teach IV drug users how to shoot up safely are suspicious to many blacks, who feel such programs only encourage more drug use.

Denial and misinformation about all sexually transmitted diseases are rampant in the black community. One of the biggest problems HIV/AIDS educators have had in reaching African-Americans in convincing them that AIDS is not just a "gay

SUNRISE IS TO OFFER TWO FREE SCREENINGS DURING PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS WEEK

Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of male cancer deaths. According to the American Cancer Society, it is estimated that one in 11 Caucasian men will get prostate cancer during his lifetime. The figures are even higher for African-American men, one in nine. It is recommended that men over 50, or men over 40 with a family history of prostate cancer, have an annual appointment for testing. With early detection and treatment, most cases are curable.

In conjunction with Prostate Cancer Awareness Week, Humana Hospital-Sunrise will offer free prostate cancer screenings at the hospital on Wednesday, October 7 and Thursday, October 8 from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Board

certified urologists will perform the screenings.

Humana Hospital-Sunrise was chosen as one of 2,000 screening centers nationwide by the American Cancer Society to provide the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test, a more accurate means for detecting prostate cancer. The PSA test measures the blood level of a protein produced by prostate cells.

Appointments are not required for the prostate screenings. Interested individuals should check in at the information desk in the hospital's main lobby no earlier than 9 a.m. Humana Hospital-Sunrise is located at 3186 South Maryland Parkway.

Early detection is the key to surviving prostate cancer. For more information, call 731-8018.

HEALTH BRIEFS

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The Clark County Health District is searching for persons who are able to serve as loving and supportive friends of patients and families experiencing terminal illness. These persons will serve as volunteers in the Health District Hospice Program.

Thirty (30) hours of training are provided for volunteers at the Clark County Health District. Additional training in special areas is also available. An application and personal interview are required prior to training.

Please read the following detailed information. If you think you can fill this very special calling, contact Edie Blanchard, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Clark County Health District, 625 Shadow Lane, Las Vegas - 383-1341.

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HOSPICE TRAINING RECRUITMENT

The Clark County Health District Hospice Program is looking for volunteers who are able to provide emotional support and assistance to terminally ill patients and their families.

Volunteers should be available 3-5 hours each week, be at

least 18 years of age, and have their own transportation.

Extensive training will be provided at the Clark County Health District, beginning in September.

For more information or application, contact Edie Blanchard, coordinator of volunteer services, at 383-1341.

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CPR-FIRST AID TRAINING INSTITUTE has developed a special course for babysitters. The class, for boys and girls (11-18 years old), teaches safety, child and infant CPR and "basic" do's and don'ts of babysitting. Each student will receive an AHA CPR card and a "Babysitting" Certificate. The course will be held the second Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$17.00 and includes all teaching materials.

Anyone wishing any more information or wanting to register for a class should call Kenneth Glover or W.K. Vandygriff at 876-9177.

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The Johnson Community School, 7701 Ducharme Ave., will offer a pair of CPR workshops this fall. The first seminar takes place Wednesday, Octo-

ber 14 and the second will follow on Thursday, November 12. Both sessions begin at 5:30 p.m. The cost of each workshop is \$11, which includes certification. Registration continues through October 5, for both sessions. The four-hour seminars will be taught by instructors from CPR Plus and are designed for teens and adults. These programs are sponsored by the City of Las Vegas. Call 229-6175.

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"The president has declared October as Lupus Awareness month. Learn and Live. Are you aware that there are millions of men and women that are not aware that they have symptoms of undiagnosed Lupus? There is a chapter of the Lupus Foundation of America here in Las Vegas. The chapter is located at 1555 E. Flamingo Rd., Ste. 439. Call 369-0474 anytime for more information.

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— HELP —

The AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY desperately needs drivers to take cancer patients to and from their treatment locations. Contact Gina at (702) 798-6877 NOW!