

AIDS: Why are we still getting sick?

By ANNE STANCIL
Student Health Advisor

While I was getting ready to go to class this morning I was listening to the DJ on the radio read some sort of statistical report about this year's college freshmen. The DJ was reading all these things that freshmen have never known in their lifetime and modern conveniences that they have never lived without. One of the things was AIDS: college freshmen have never known life without AIDS. I wouldn't classify AIDS as a modern convenience, but certainly something that is a part of life now that wasn't before college freshmen were born. I think it is safe to broaden the statistic to encompass all undergraduate students since I myself (a junior) can't remember not hearing about AIDS either. If we have grown up knowing about this disease, why are 18-22 year olds still contracting HIV? Obviously we weren't really paying attention these last twenty years.

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV is spread through unprotected hetero- and homosexual intercourse, by sharing contaminated needles, through contact with infected blood, from infected mothers to their babies during pregnancy or childbirth, and through breast milk. No evidence exists that HIV is spread through sweat, tears, urine, or feces. Although researchers have detected HIV in the saliva of infected individuals, there have been no reports that it is spread through saliva (ie. kissing). These are all facts that most of us, hopefully all of us, already know. It seems so simple: HIV is spread through unprotected sex and i.v. drug use. If you don't practice those things you won't get HIV. Still, in 1998 approximately 7,000 young people aged 10-24 became infected with HIV every day worldwide. In 1997 there were 60,634 cases reported in the United States. Why is this epidemic still spreading? It seems that we know so much about this disease and yet, we can't seem to stop it. There must still be a mentality that "it is not going to happen to me" which is keeping people from protecting themselves. You can't tell by looking at a person if he or she has AIDS. The only way to know is through a blood test. This blood test is available in Charlotte, and it works by testing for HIV antibodies in the blood. These antibodies, however, do not reach detectable levels until one to three months and may take as long as six months to show up in the blood test. If you think you have been exposed to HIV or any sexually transmitted disease, contact the Health Center immediately. The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia have defined official criteria for having full blown AIDS as having a CD4+T cell count fewer than 200. (Healthy adults usually have T cell counts of 1000 or

more.) Once a person has AIDS it can be treated with a variety of medications, but there is no cure.

Perhaps our generation has become desensitized to the AIDS epidemic. Considering we have never known life without it, perhaps we don't pay attention anymore, and therefore we are careless. December 1 was World AIDS day. The Davidson community participated in this event by providing an information table for students, faculty, and staff, and lighting luminaria in memorial of AIDS victims on the paths around Chambers.

AIDS is an unbiased disease. It does not discriminate against gender, race, culture, or belief. Heterosexual transmission of HIV accounts for an increasing proportion of AIDS cases in the United States. AIDS is now the fifth leading cause of death in the US among people aged 25-34. Please, if you are sexually active, use a latex condom, and don't share needles! Although we have never known life without this horrible disease, we have the power to stop it. That power is the power of knowledge and prevention.

Alternative Gift Market inspires holiday spirit

By MELISSA DE CASTRIQUE
Arts & Living Editor

Last Sunday, Davidson students once again had the opportunity to purchase unique holiday presents that benefit worthy service organizations. This event, the Alternative Gift Market, was held on December 6 from 2-4 PM in the 900 Room of the Union.

The Alternative Gift Market allows gift-buyers to make donations in the name of friends or family to fund projects worldwide. Gift prices ranged from one dollar for tree seedlings in Haiti to leprosy screening in India to over one thousand dollars for building materials for one house in Mexico. Local service organizations were represented as well. Organizations were categorized according to the type of gifts available, such as gifts of education, gifts for the environment, and gifts of food, among others. Tables were set up in the 900 Room for the different types of organizations. Volunteers at each table provided information about the various gifts that could be purchased. Student volunteer Kate Helm ('01) said, "The Alternative Gift Market is a great idea. These gifts are much more meaningful than the traditional holiday present."

Once browsers decided which gifts to buy, they paid for their choices at one of the tables. For each gift purchased, the giver received a card to give or send to the person in whose name the donation was made.

The Alternative Gift Market was considered a success by both volunteers and buyers alike. Students who attended were not only able to get into the true giving spirit of the holidays but also became more aware of worldwide needs.

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