



26th FEBRUARY

G.H.A. PRESS RELEASE.

REF/ HTLV-3 ANTI-BODY TEST.

Gay Health Action is a group formed with the support of almost all the gay groups in Ireland. Our programme is to provide information to our community on all aspects of gay health and to actively campaign for medical services.

We have taken the initiative in disseminating accurate information on AIDS in Ireland. G.H.A. is concerned about the current screening of the high risk population for the AIDS virus. We are worried for a number of reasons:-

- a) The test is misleadingly described as a test for AIDS. While the test can show whether the person has had contact with the virus it is not a reliable indication of how many people will develop AIDS.
- b) Anonymity is not safe-guarded at the moment. Without an anti-discrimination law we fear that people who are anti-body positive may be discriminated against.
- c) Because of the lack of counselling both before and after testing, there is the fear that people will suffer undue emotional stress if tested positive. There are even fears of possible suicide cases.

G.H.A. recognises the need for accurate information on the test coupled with proper counselling and information on risk reduction. We have produced the HTLV-3 Test Leaflet to inform the gay community and other at-risk groups about the test and its implications. It should be read by everyone if they are considering taking the test. The leaflet was drawn up with the advice of medical practitioners and other AIDS groups world wide.

10 Fownes Street,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-710939.
11 a.m.-4 p.m., Mon-Fri
24 Sullivan's Quay,
Cork.
Tel: 021-967660.

Follow on.....

AIDS is a difficult virus to contract. It is spread by blood to blood contact, and certain kinds of sexual contact. Our only effective weapon against AIDS at the moment, is clearly detailed information on risk reduction. The safe-sex card is designed to fulfil this need. The safe-sex message applies particularly to individuals in all risk groups, whether they are anti-body positive or not. We encourage people to avoid the sexual practices which can enable the virus to spread.

CAIRDE is a support group which offers advice and support to anyone affected by AIDS. This includes those who have full AIDS, those who are tested positive, those who have AIDS Related Complex (ARC), and the families and friends of those affected by AIDS. CAIRDE also offers counselling about the implications of the test. CAIRDE is presently facilitating a Self Help group for anyone who is anti-body positive. Further information about this group is available by contacting G.H.A. at 710895 (Dublin) between 11.00am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

END OF PRESS RELEASE.

Feb 28, 1986

Gays say testing high risk AIDS groups unacceptable

THE testing of everyone in high risk groups for the HTLVIII virus would be "a dangerous and unacceptable development," according to the Gay Health Action Group.

The group points out that: "Taking the test is a personal decision and must remain so."

"The HTLVIII test has been promoted as though it is a test for AIDS. However, this is not the truth. The misunderstanding presents two main problems. It puts greater stress on people who have been found positive. Many of these people feel that they have AIDS already and that they may as well die now."

According to a leaflet published by the G.H.A.G.

this week, suicides have been reported as a result of this kind of stress.

The Group feels that this testing opens the way for discrimination against those tested positive, as well as those in the high-risk groups.

"Experience abroad shows that people tested positive have been discriminated against by employers, authorities and insurers. A similar situation must not happen in Ireland and the best way to ensure this is to have an anonymous test, rather than a confidential test."

A "number only system" is advocated in the leaflet, so that the identity of the person being tested is not known to anyone

involved in the procedure.

"The best reason for taking the test is when a doctor recommends it as part of a general diagnosis."

If a test is carried out for an individual's own information, they should bear in mind the consequences of being tested positive.

The leaflet recommends that anyone considering taking the test should talk to a Cairde counsellor who can be contacted through the S.T.D. clinics or the Gay Health Action Group in Dublin.

A card detailing safe sexual practices has also been published.

Hospitals providing HTLVIII test service



Dr. James Walsh.

ALL the major Dublin voluntary hospitals, and at least one hospital in each Health Board area, are now providing a testing service for the AIDS antibodies HTLVIII.

GPs could refer patients whom they thought at risk to

any of these centres, according to Dr. J.H. Walsh the National AIDS Co-Ordinator.

He said the hospitals would initially do an ELIZA test and if this was positive would carry out a second similar test. If this was positive the patients would then be sent to the UCD Virus Reference Laboratory for a confirmatory test.

Doctors however should not initially refer patients to the Virus Reference Laboratory unless they had previously had two positive ELIZA tests.

Within the next few days the Department of Health is to send every practising doctor in the country a booklet giving this and other advice on dealing with AIDS victims and those at risk of AIDS.

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Boards abandon the GMS panel for jobs

THE eight Health Boards have abandoned the national panel for the recruitment of assistants to the GMS and are all setting up their own.

The national panel is still in existence but the numbers on it have dwindled to about 30.

The Southern Health Board have set a regional panel which incorporates the national

national panel and have continued to advertise when vacancies occur to create their own candidates.

The South Eastern Health Board set up their own panel, late last year and they are now looking at it again as most of the doctors on the panel are now employed elsewhere.

The Mid Western Health Board will be setting up a panel

the past three years. During that period the prison's population has risen from 460 to 560 prisoners. The prison authorities at Mountjoy have also had to contend with an increasing incidence of drug abuse at the jail and its attendant medical problems.

Arguing for a more compassionate attitude towards prisoners, Mr Lonergan is critical of some media treatment of crime issues which have described offenders as "beasts".

"It is often forgotten, sometimes conveniently, that people committed to prison were full members of society immediately prior to their committal. Indeed, many are committed to prison direct from society in an appalling state, physically and mentally."

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Michael Finan — who started work in a small garage in 1976 and now employ 40 people. It was they who also invented in 1979 a turf-cutting machine that harvests peat in the form of tubes.

Yesterday's demonstration was described as a world premier by Mr Michael Herbst, whose Co Wicklow company markets the bogmiser. Those present watched with fascination as the ungainly automated monster moved through the heather spewing out a plush carpet of very soggy peat behind it. A group of Scotsmen were so impressed by what they saw that they ordered one of the machines for use back in the highlands at a cost of £130,000.

Two Americans from the State of Maine indicated that they would buy three of the bogmisers to help harvest the 12 million acres of peat in Maine as fuel for a giant power station there.

Financial hardship for kidney patients

By Dr David Nowlan,
Medical Correspondent

PATIENTS with chronic kidney failure are suffering financial hardship either because some essential medications are not available through the medical card scheme, or because of delays by the health boards in paying refunds under the drug rebate scheme. Some are finding the maximum VHI cover is insufficient to meet all hospital bills.

These facts are revealed by a confidential survey of 164 patients conducted by the Irish Kidney Association and covering all eight health board areas. The association's administrator, Ms Patricia Doherty, says the financial problems faced by some patients may lead them to stop taking essential medications. "The end result could be fatal," she adds, urging that free drugs must be provided to these patients directly through

the hospitals, or by including kidney failure in the Long Term Illness scheme or through the provision of special medical cards which would cover all medications.

The findings of the survey are published in the current issue of the association's magazine, *Support*, and include what Ms Doherty says could be a fairly typical breakdown of the finances of a male patient in his thirties undergoing regular dialysis. His income from a Disabled Person's Maintenance Allowance would be £41.55 a week, of which £25 would go on lodgings and £2 on medicines, leaving only £14.55 for food and all other expenditure.

People undergoing regular dialysis will usually have to maintain an intake of multivitamin pills and may want simple antacids (such as Gelusil or Aludrox). Many will also require antiseptic lotions and dressings to protect

the sites where dialysis is carried out, whether on the arm or the abdomen. Some need iron tonics and trace element supplements. None of these preparations is available on the medical card scheme and their regular purchase can impose financial strain on medical card holders.

Patients who are deemed to be too wealthy for medical cards are entitled to a refund of any amount in excess of £28 spent on prescribed medications in a calendar month. A survey of 30 patients in the Eastern Health Board area with chronic kidney failure shows that the amounts sought in refunds may range up to £150 a month. But the delay in paying these refunds is never less than four weeks and may be as much as three months, during which the patient must find those sums to buy more medicines.

In a few of the cases studied, local pharmacists are carrying the

financial burden incurred by the delay in the health boards' payments of refunds. But delays are reported by patients in all health board areas except the midland and mid-western. The report says some means must be found of providing free drugs to all these patients and that the responsibility rests with the Minister and Department of Health.

Only a small number of the patients surveyed (36) carried Voluntary Health Insurance. But many of these, according to the report, were finding that even with maximum cover from the VHI they had not enough to settle all their hospital bills — especially those charged by the X-ray and pathology departments.

Many of the 500 patients reported high levels of anxiety about transport and telephone bills, and extra expenses were frequently incurred by the need to buy special diets.

required for entry because of the varied nature of their work.

After the launch of the booklet, the Cistercians and their guests went on a tour of St. Mary's Abbey, in the city centre, which was the first Cistercian foundation in Dublin.

Elderly at risk from cold—Alone

The Alone organisation has appealed to neighbours of elderly people who live alone to ensure that they have enough fuel and bedding to survive the cold, following the death on Tuesday night of an 82-year-old woman in her home in Crumlin, Dublin.

"Old folks succumb to hypothermia very slowly," according to Alone. "Their body temperature may drop by as little as one or two degrees over 24-hours, and they may not realise themselves that they are slowly freezing up inside. It's important that outsiders judge the temperature of their homes regularly."

Gay group urges anonymity for AIDS test

By Dr David Nowlan,
Medical Correspondent

THE GAY Health Action Group yesterday advised persons undergoing blood screening tests for antibodies against the AIDS virus to seek anonymity by using personal numbers rather than their names.

The group also called for more counselling services for those whose blood is found to contain antibodies in an effort to reduce the real possibility of suicide in such cases. A new leaflet giving details of the HTLV 3 test (as the antibody test is known) was published yesterday by the group, along with cards advising people

how to "Play Safe" by avoiding sexual practices which carry a high risk of transmitting the AIDS virus. The group's first leaflet providing general information on the disease, of which 16,000 copies were printed, is now out of print and it is hoped to publish a new revised version of this next week.

Gay Health Action is a voluntary group depending for its finances on donations and fund-raising activities, and its own counselling service, known as Cairde, is staffed entirely by volunteers. This is the only AIDS counselling service in the country and is currently providing a self-help service for those found to

have positive HTLV 3 antibody tests. Cairde may be contacted at Dublin (01) 710895, Monday to Friday, between 11.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. It has also provided assistance to haemophiliac patients and drug abusers found to have positive antibody tests.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by the HTLV 3 virus which can be transmitted only by way of blood or semen. Persons exposed to the virus through sexual intercourse or contaminated blood, blood products or dirty needles will develop antibodies against the virus. But to have a positive antibody test does not indicate the presence of active AIDS or

even of the milder ARC (AIDS-Related Complex). Indeed, only about five per cent of those found to be HTLV 3 antibody positive are thought to go on to develop the full illness and about 10 per cent develop ARC (although these figures have recently been challenged and may have to be increased as more evidence comes to light).

The Gay Health Action Group wants the tests to be processed entirely anonymously because it fears that there is a risk that those with positive tests may be identified, ostracised and isolated. It points to what has happened to Mountjoy prisoners found to be positive. In other countries lists

of people have been compiled by public authorities from antibody screening programmes.

The group acknowledges that screening tests performed at Sexually Transmitted Diseases clinics are treated with confidentiality, but say this is not enough to protect those with positive tests.

The leaflet — "AIDS — The HTLV 3 Test" and a special card on what sexual practices are safe, and what risky — "Play Safe" — are available from the Gay Health Action Group at 10 Fownes Street, Dublin 2 (phone 710939) or at 24 Sullivan's Quay, Cork (phone 967660).