HEALTH AND WELFARE

AIDS IN THE COMMUNITY

By Dr. Barbara Lyles

The young man stood before his parents simply looking from one to the other. When the words finally came, they were halting, slow; the look downcast. The lowered eyes held a haunting, unbearably sad emptiness.

"Mom. Dad. I'm going to die. I have AIDS."

All over the world these scenes are being replayed. Mother, son, lover, husband, friend. You?

In life there is always death. As soon as one lives he's old enough to die. Man, sadly, perhaps, is the only animal that knows that he must die. Knowing that we must die still has not taken away the fact, that for most of us, the notion of death and dying is either a far off event or something which we regard with terror and with a sense of "somebody else, not me."

There was a time in our history when life and death were so common a part of living, that developed a nearly fatalistic notion about it. There was even a kind of acceptance that allowed them to survive in the face of death . . unexpected at the same time.

Such is the case in times of war and pestilence. Such was the case in times when childbirth deaths, deaths from diseases now easily controlled with antibiotic therapy were common.

There have been times in our history during which deaths occurred in such large numbers that people began to wonder if it would ever end.

The history of mankind has also known the deaths from plagues such as the Bubonic Plague-The Black Death and the influenza epidemic of 1917.

Young people often view death as some romantic far off even unrelated to them or their need to have a good time. As one ages, one's philosophy of death is shaped by the many experiences of loss that had to be faced.

The closing decades of this century bring us death in many forms. Drug deals gone wrong have littered urban streets and alleys with the bodies of the young and vital.

Saturday night specials dispatch ordinary uninvolved people attacked by nearly inhuman monsters intent upon stealing a few pennies to buy drugs, gold chains, designer jeans, jeackets with University insignias and costly running shoes.

Perhaps the killers believe that their need for the good things in life cheapen the value of the lives of others. No matter what the cause, death is no longer something that happens to old people.

The new epidemic is upon us. AIDS is, in every sense of the word, a new plague. As heartening as it may seem, when we would most like to believe that we're finally learning how to live, we must begin to learn how to die. Nobody to date has survived AIDS infection.

One hundred percent of those diagnosed with AIDS in 1982 are now known to be dead.

The faintest glimmer of hope comes to us by way of new medical findings that report that four young men who tested positive for the virus and whose bodies had developed antibodies to the disease for some unexplained reason apparently, over a twenty-four month period appeared to test negative for antibodies and the virus itself.

Researchers tell us that a vaccine or a cure is a long way off. When we look at this information, we must stop and reflect upon both life and death.

There are more than 934 cases of AIDS in children. Nearly 90% of AIDS victims are in the prime of life . . . between twenty-four and forty-nine years old; we must either decide to change our patterns of living or begin to learn how to die.

For I-V drug abusers, one may imagine, a decision has already been made. For them, there are three probable — all deadly - alternatives. They may die from a drug overdose or the body's misfunction because of it's inability to absorb any more of the position.

They may die at the hands of a trigger happy drug dealer who has been cheated out of his profit.

If he's a drug abuser who shares "works" he may well have chosen the worst death of all; the lingering wasting death that is known to be the lot of AIDS victims.

How does one learn to die? In order to learn how to die, one must first have learned how to live. Because death is an unknown and associated with sadness and loss, we've tended to be willing to deal with it until we are forced to do so. AIDS forces us to look into the face of death.

People young and old; many just beginning to live are forced to tell parents, lovers, children and friends that they have AIDS. The saddest of all are those individuals who know that they have the disease, yet do not change their personal and sexual behaviors.

It is such people as these who are responsible for the unchecked speed of this 20th century killer. The only answer is to find out if you are infected if you are in one of the groups at risk for AIDS infection. To engage in high risk behaviors is to chance nearly sure death. To share IV works with others is to risk nearly sure death.

To be infected and to take the chance of infecting others makes you a killer. It is very likely that very soon to infect somebody with AIDS when you know that you are infected will be considered a criminal offense equivalent to manslaughter at the very least.

Death is never pretty; death from AIDS is a horrible pain, wasting death.

Would it not be far better to accept the human condition that assumes that we must all die at some time to select sure death. If you choose to die perhaps that personal choice is something that no one can take from you. At least allow the people whom you love make their own choice about their willingness to live or die on your terms rather than their own.

Photo by Paul Greene

KEEPING THE FIGHT ALIVE — Residents of the Ashburton Apartments continue to complain about inconveniences, due to renovations, as workers make changes daily.

Ashburton

Continued from Page 1A

Fayette and Gay Streets, by Prushanski, owner and-manager of the apartments.

Prushanski was seeking rent from each for the month of May. Saunder's rent was $285, Gordon's was $290, Woodly's was $285 and Stewart's was $280.

All four cases were to be heard by Judge Arie Davis in rent court Thursday but after hearing Stewart's case, Davis suggested that the Ashburton Apartment tenants meet with Prushanski to solve their problems.

"It seems to me that this is more of a public relations problem than anything else," said Davis.

The tenants were not happy about the renovations process and "frankly I don't blame them," said Judge Davis.

He pointed to the complaints lodged against the management company as reasons the tenants should be angry.

Housing inspectors found defective floors, plaster, window sash, a possible defective faucet and a missing smoke detector, in Stewart's apartment.

Davis ordered Prushanski to replace the smoke detector before he received May's rent from Stewart.

"This is one judge that won't get out of bed and read in the paper that some tenant died in a fire ... because no smoke detector was there, knowing that I sent that tenant out of here and ordered them to pay rent on that apartment," the judge said.

"I don't think the legislators in Maryland want any person in the state to sleep for one night without a smoke detector," Davis added.

He postponed the remaining cases until June 17, before which, he suggested Prushanski and the tenants hold a meeting to negotiate their case outside of court.

Stewart was represented by Mary Benns, of Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc. Benns is a tenant organizer, and not a legal attorney.

In her argument on Stewart's behalf, Benns said, "Prior to all of the renovations happening, the manager did not hold a meeting with tenants to explain to them what would be happening."

"Ms. Stewart chose a certain standard of life and because of renovations, that standard of life has been lessened," Benns said.

Prushanski has said that he announced the conversion of the apartments to Section 8 housing and the renovations, in a public hearing, but tenants complained that they did not receive any direct information.

Tenants said they were aware of the conversion and renovation only when construction work began on the apartments.

"I don't believe all the efforts to apprise you of what was going on were made," Davis told the resident.

"It pains me to be here because it is unnecessary," said Prushanski. "If the situation could have been resolved outside of court I would not be here."

The owner said he would like to meet with the tenants and discuss their grievances.

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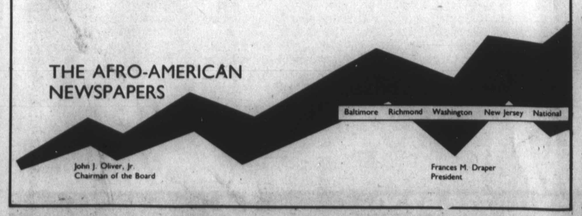

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—Seattle man wages

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Shields.

Shields filed suit with Seattle's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on Sept. 20, 1974 and with the Washington State Human Rights Commission (WHRC) seeking "considerable damages."

Attorney Peter Bocho, who investigated the case from September through December 1974, said that the suit had enough merit to warrant class-action status.

However, Shields claims that his charge was not thoroughly investigated by commission investigator Beverly Fox — who filed a "no reasonable cause" finding—since she was allegedly in collusion with Quemetco. Fox declined to comment on the case.

Raleigh Lewis, director of the WHRC from 1980-85, said that the investigation found that Shield's "charges were without merit" and that "his claims were not supported by the evidence. The files (accumulated from 1974-85) do not support negligence (or collusion)."

Shields, who had contacted Congressman Mike Lowry (D-WA) about his situation, claims that Lowry's office — in collusion with Quemetco (Tim Cottrell, in particular) — had effectively initiated a "gag order" not permitting "any national exposure of the situation."

Lowry refused to return AFRO calls.

Turning to black agencies for assistance, Shields visited the NAACP's Seattle office three times and the ACL which were both ineffective.

"I feel a little disenchanted about (the ineffectiveness and disinterest) of the black organizations," he said.

Then, in 1986, Shields took his complaints to Operation Push and the Rev. Ed Riddick, a PUSH official. After receiving confirmation of a meeting, Shields went to Chicago on Sept. 5, but Riddick had left town, and no other employee was familiar with the case according to Shields.

Shields filed suit in small claims against Operation PUSH in order to recoup his travel expenses — which he claims Riddick promised to reimburse. He said that on Feb. 13, 1987, he appeared in court in Chicago, at which time PUSH lawyers were granted a continuance until April 23, 1987.

On that date, Shields returned to Chicago where due to the absence of PUSH's lawyers, he was granted a $2,500 default judgment against PUSH.

"I take no joy in pursuing PUSH," said Shields.

He claims to have visited over 60 lawyers and to have spent approximately $10,000 during his 14-year quest.

Shields admitted that his decision to blow the whistle has "changed it (my life) dramatically, because I've never been on the streets before."

But, he added "I have no qualms, I would do it again. I march to the beat of one drummer, and that's justice for the people of the state of Washington."

RICHMOND ATTORNEY Sa'ad El-Amin is restrained by the Sergeant at Arms during the Virginia Democratic convention recently. El-Amin led a vocal group that caused nominee Charles Robb to halt his acceptance speech for a few minutes just as he learned he could plead his own case before the Virginia State Bar.

Richmond attorney can plead case before bar

By Sharon E. Wilkerson
AFRO Staff Writer

RICHMOND

Richmond attorney Sa'ad El-Amin has a chance to argue his claim that his First Amendment right of free speech has been violated by the Virginia State Bar, before a committee of the Bar, ruled U. S. District Judge James R. Spencer.

Spencer said last week that El-Amin should have "an adequate opportunity" to voice his claims before the Fourth District Committee-Western Section, and that the State Bar hearing will proceed.

The opportunity came after Spencer denied El-Amin an injunction, which would have stopped the Bar from holding a disciplinary hearing over El-Amin's statements about the cases of a client, the Rev. Clyde Johnson of Petersburg.

The Bar hearing, originally set for Monday, June 6, has been postponed until July.

Last month, El-Amin was accused of professional misconduct by the Bar for comments he made at a public meeting.

Johnson, a former Baptist minister and Petersburg councilman, was convicted last year on 15 charges of sexual misconduct with girls. Johnson is serving a 120-year sentence.

El-Amin's statements, which were made during an Aug. 2 public forum at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Petersburg, were critical of prosecutors, and principal prosecutor, former Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Joseph E. Preston, complained to the Bar.

El-Amin allegedly stated at the forum that Preston offered Johnson a poorer plea bargain than given in a similar case. Preston denied offering any plea bargain.

Spencer said evidence may have existed of an incomplete initial investigation but not of bad faith.

Written rules that specifically outline how to handle constitutional challenges to the Bar's authority to hear those cases should be established, Spencer stated adding "It would be better to have rules."

El-Amin said his suit challenged the lack of a procedure and "sensitized" the Bar—the two reasons for him bringing it "A litigant ought to be certain that there will be a ruling," said El-Amin.

Rhetta M. Daniel, an assistant Bar counsel who is prosecuting the Bar's case against El-Amin, was called by El-Amin to testify. Ms. Daniel said that during her six years with the Bar, she had never seen a constitutional challenge and no procedure for exists for handling one.

Ms. Daniel refused comment after the hearing.

However, district committee chairman Thomas H. Rose, Jr. said his nine member committee would handle El-Amin's constitutional challenge the best it can.

National church group boycotts Shell Oil

By Misty Brown
AFRO Staff Writer

The National Council of Churches has decided to boycott Royal Dutch/Shell Oil Company because of its affiliation with the apartheid government of South Africa.

The 260-member Governing Board endorsed a resolution without a single dissenting vote.

"Doesn't Shell know that profits made off the backs of Africans crushed by apartheid is a loser? Profitability at the expense of the oppressed is the ultimate illegitimacy in the church and elsewhere," said the Reverend Avery Post, head of the United Church of Christ.

Timothy Smith, executive director, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility said, "Shell/Royal Dutch is the largest oil company in the world and the largest investor in South Africa."

The NCC resolution noted that South African law defines oil as "munition of war," that oil products are vital to the South African police and military in their enforcement of apartheid, in their illegal occupation of Namibia, and in their destabilization of neighboring states.

NCC urged the Royal Dutch/Shell corporations to withdraw all its operations and investments from South Africa. In addition, NCC urged all its member communions to join the boycott. All of the major black denominations are members of the NCC and their delegations voted enthusiastically for the boycott.

The Reverend Cecil L. Murray of the African Methodist Episcopal Church speaking for the Minority Caucus, said, "If Shell won't hear an appeal to morality, perhaps they will hear an appeal to profits." He said he was joining 300 black churches in Los Angeles in burning his Shell credit card.

Alcohol and other drug use

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the National Institute on Drug Abuse are seeking research applications to investigate the factors contributing to the sequencing of alcohol and other drug use.

DEADLINES: Oct. 1 and Feb. 1.

FUNDS: About $500,000 is available for fiscal 1988. Up to three awards will be made.

CONTACT: NIAAA — Thomas Harford, Division of Biometry and Epidemiology, NIAAA, Parklawn Bldg., 5600 Fishers Lane, Rm. 14C-26, Rockville, MD 20857, (301) 443-3306, NIDA — Roy Pickens, Division of Clinical Research, Rm. 10A-38, same address, (301) 443-6697.

AIDS awareness campaign begins big push in L.A.

LOS ANGELES—A special outreach to inform the black community about AIDS prevention was announced recently by Stephanie Lee-Miller, assistant secretary for public affairs, for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Mayor Tom Bradley.

The effort is in support of the eight-page brochure, "Understanding AIDS," produced by HHS and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), to be mailed to every American household by June 30.

Lee-Miller, who joined Mayor Bradley at the Los Angeles kick-off, emphasized the importance of discussing the facts in the brochure with family and friends. Lee-Miller is featured in television and radio public service announcements which encourages the public to read the brochure, and share the information with family and friends.

The mailing and support activities are part of the federal government's "American Responds to AIDS" education and information campaign.

"The brochure is written at a 7th grade level which may make it difficult reading for some in our communities," Lee-Miller said. "Those who can read the brochure should share this life-saving information with those who are unable to read it." "There is no vaccine against AIDS. The only vaccine is information about AIDS and about the behavior that places individuals at risk for acquiring the disease." She added "we must make sure that everyone has the information needed to avoid exposure to AIDS."

"This brochure is an important step in our efforts to raise the public's awareness of AIDS and also dispel myths about the disease," said Bradley in support for the mailing. "We need to make sure that the message goes out that this brochure is one of the best tools for learning more about the disease in the black community."

Los Angeles, the largest American city with a black mayor, was the site of the first of a series of events which will focus specifically on outreach to the Black community in conjunction with the national AIDS mailing. Similar events will take place during June in six other cities: Cleveland, Houston, New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago and Atlanta.

Special information outreach also has been designed for the Hispanic community.

Joining Mayor Bradley and Ms. Lee-Miller at the Los Angeles news conference was Webster J. Guillory, President of the National Organization of Black County Officials, Inc. (NOBCO), based in Los Angeles, is working with HHS and the CDC to develop AIDS education and awareness programs.

MAYOR TOM BRADLEY (left) joins Stephanie Lee-Miller, assistant secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services during an announcement in Los Angeles urging all members of the black community to read and to discuss the brochure on AIDS being mailed out by the department this month.

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Mr. Harris has enjoyed a successful career in New York City since 1967. He has won major awards and his work is featured in magazines and billboards across the country.