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Issue 1

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If you've had PCP,
you may need
pentamidine.
Call 591-8489.

AIDS ACTION NEWS!

500 PROTEST GOV'T INACTION



Members of Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto at AIDS ACTION NOW! candlelight vigil at Toronto General Hospital March 25th.

Nearly 500 people marched down Yonge Street Friday night, March 25th, to protest the Federal Government's failure to streamline testing of new AIDS drugs in Canada.

The rally was organized by AIDS ACTION NOW! in response to a proposed study of aerosolized pentamidine in which half the participants will be given a placebo (non-effective substance) instead of the real drug. (see Placebo Roulette on page 3)

"The proposed experiment is evil," said person with AIDS Bill Greenways, addressing protesters at the rally. "In its proposed form it will undoubtedly cause unnecessary suffering and death."

Greenways pointed out that the pentamidine treatment is already available

on compassionate grounds in the United States.

"It's taken two years for the Federal Centre for AIDS to get any drug testing going in Canada," says AAN! spokesperson Tim McCaskell, "and now the first study that's proposed is ethically flawed." Despite rainy weather, the march ended with a candlelight vigil in front of Toronto General Hospital, one of seven Canadian hospitals participating in the pentamidine study. Says Gary Kinsman of the Public Action Committee, "We were really pleased with the turn-out. I think we've forced the powers-that-be to take note of us and to see that our community is upset by what they're doing."

A Tale of Major Betrayal

This is a tale of betrayal with moments of heroism and moments of the sort of comedy we could all do without.

Toronto's earliest diagnosis of what we now know as AIDS, according to one source, came about in June, 1980. John Sewell was mayor, George Hislop was raising funds for his run for city council later in the year and the Toronto School Board was debating whether or not to liaise with the gay/lesbian community. Anita Bryant (remember her?) was divorcing what's-his-name. The diagnosis of Kaposi's Sarcoma lesions on the face of a gay man made no headlines.

Six years passed. AIDS cases multiplied. The government did piss-all about finding drugs to combat the new syndrome. But on 6 October 1986, the minister of National Health and Welfare made a bold pledge. (Here comes the moment of heroism.) "The policy of the Health Protection Branch," he announced, "is to seek out, encourage the availability, and facilitate the use of experimental drugs in Canada." Furthermore, he added, "everything possible" — those are his words — "everything possible will be done by the Health Protection Branch to facilitate the whole process."

Dear Jake Epp, we might have written, since Epp was (and is) the Minister in question — what a fabulous promise! What leadership this shows! What hope you give to Canadians with AIDS and ARC, to people who test positive for the HIV virus. "Everything possible," and this in a strong policy statement to a Standing Committee in the House of Commons.

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