

— WITH LINES FROM UP

## AIDS group rips red tape

AIDS activists wrapped themselves in red tape at Nathan Phillips Square yesterday to protest government bureaucracy.

Most belonged to AIDS Action Now! — a Toronto group seeking greater access to treatment for people with AIDS.

Many demonstrators were also taking part in a weekend meeting of AIDS caregivers being held in the council chamber.



Jan 13  
Sun  
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Jan 13  
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# AIDS protesters urge better care

By Tony Wong  
TORONTO STAR

More than 80 AIDS activists demonstrated at Nathan Phillips Square to protest what they say is a "bureaucratic nightmare" in receiving medical treatment in Ontario.

Chanting "money for AIDS not for war" and "full funding for AIDS drugs," several demonstrators tied themselves in symbolic "red tape" in front of Toronto City Hall yesterday.

The demonstration was attended by top AIDS activists from across the province who were at city hall for a meeting of the Ontario AIDS Network.

"There are nothing but obstacles in the way to get standard drugs for people with AIDS," said Philip Berger, co-chairman of the Toronto HIV primary care physicians group, which sees nearly 4,000 patients in the city.

Berger said some standard drugs, such as fluconazole, an anti-fungal drug used in AIDS patients as "penicillin is used for strep throat," are a nightmare to obtain.

First the physician must write a

letter to the health ministry explaining why his patient needs the drug, and it could take weeks before it is approved.

Meanwhile, the patient goes through "extreme anxiety. It's unfair to do this to someone who's dying," Berger said.

The amount of paper work necessary is also a reason why many doctors choose not to get involved with AIDS patients, Berger added.

Another problem is cost. Some drugs such as flucanazole can cost as much as \$800 per month.

"This forces some people who would otherwise be productive to cut their jobs to go on welfare so they can have drug benefits," Berger said.

Others are forced into taking up costly hospital bed-space so they can get the drugs for free. They would have to pay if they took the drugs at home, activists say.

Berger, who is a member of the government-appointed Ontario AIDS Advisory Committee, criticized provincial Health Minister Evelyn Gigantes for not doing more.

## MD urges action on AIDS drugs

Special to The Globe and Mail

TORONTO — Ontario Health Minister Evelyn Gigantes is not acting quickly enough on recommendations that AIDS drugs be made easier to obtain, says the co-chairman of the Toronto HIV Primary Care Physicians Group.

Philip Berger said the ministry has ignored recommendations by the AIDS Advisory Committee to recognize the "urgent need" for two drugs to be put on the Ontario Drug Benefits Plan formulary.

Drugs not on the formulary are made difficult to obtain by complicated paperwork, Dr. Berger said.

Ms. Gigantes said AIDS drugs are more experimental than other drugs on the formulary because special conditions have been made by the ministry.

Jan 14 Globe ↓