

Toronto Moves on Anonymous Testing

On Wednesday, April 5th, the Board of Health of the City of Toronto approved the use of anonymous HIV test sites as part of a comprehensive public health effort to limit the spread of HIV infection.

The Board of Health took up the issue of anonymous testing after AAN! asked it to approve our seven point policy programme adopted at last year's annual general meeting. Point three asked the government to approve the use of anonymous test sites.

The need for anonymous testing has long been recognized as an important measure in stemming the spread of HIV infection in other parts of the world. It has, however, been a very contentious issue in Ontario. The Reports on AIDS of both the Royal Society and the Ontario Bar Association support anonymous testing. However, the Canadian Medical Association and the National Advisory Committee on AIDS (NACA) have come out against anonymous testing, the NACA pointing out that it is a "less than optimal" practice for managing the epidemic.

The most serious opposition to anonymous testing has come from Richard Shabas, the Chief Medical Officer

of Health at Queen's Park. At present, the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act prohibits anonymous testing, and he wants to keep it that way.

As many people know, Toronto's Hassle Free Clinic has for some years offered a form of anonymous HIV testing. Since the beginning of the year the Clinic has faced increasing political and administrative pressure from both the province and the city to stop this program. Part of having the city council approve AAN!'s 7-point policy has been to develop political support for anonymous HIV testing sites. The situation, of course, is more serious outside of Toronto where it is extraordinarily difficult to maintain the confidentiality of test results.

The next step in having anonymous testing approved is when the Board of Health reports to Toronto City Council. That will be towards the end of April. If City Council approves the Board of Health's recommendation on anonymous testing, then the city will have to ask Queen's Park to change the Health Protection and Promotion Act. Given the opposition to anonymous testing by the Ministry of Health, this could be a very serious political struggle.

George Smith

AIDS Drugs Now Available

After a year of public protests and lobbying efforts by AIDS groups, the Health Protection Branch of Health and Welfare Canada has issued a statement saying it "has taken several important measures to ensure that drugs are made available to AIDS patients and that the movement of drugs through the approval process is expedited."

The HPB statement, released February 8, 1989, lists a number of experimental drugs which are currently undergoing or being considered for clinical trials in Canada, but which can be made available for individual patients "on compassionate grounds" through what is called the Emergency Drug Release Program.

Under this program, a doctor can request the release of a drug which has not yet been approved in Canada for marketing or for clinical trials. The drug's manufacturer is authorized by the HPB to provide the patient with the drug, but may also charge for it.

The list of available drugs includes:

* Anti-AIDS drugs: Zidovudine (AZT); Ansamycin; Dextran Sulphate; EL10 (DHEA)

* Drugs for AIDS-related illnesses: alpha-Interferon; beta-Interferon; Ganciclovir; Foscarnet; Pentamidine (aerosol); Pentamidine (intravenous); Eflornithine; Trimetrexate; Ansamycin; Fluconazole; Clindamycin/Pyrimethamine

* AIDS Vaccines: Human T-lymphotropic virus type 3 gp160 antigens recombinant vaccine.

Doctors may request emergency drug releases or get more information by calling the Health Protection Branch in Ottawa at (613) 993-3105 - after hours at (613) 993-0123.

David Adkin