

Choosing a health care provider

Many gay men and lesbians face the prospect of finding a health care provider with a certain amount of confusion and worry. It is important to find someone who is not only competent but trustworthy and caring. Finding such a person seems to be an overwhelming task.

The time to look for a health care provider is when you are healthy. This will give you the time to find the person who views your health care needs in the same way that you do. When faced with this task, it helps to face it as you would hiring any service provider. Ask people you trust for recommendations, and interview the person you are about to hire. Obviously there are some differences in hiring a health care provider - for one you have to pay for the interview. But, the principle is the same. A health care provider is someone who works for you to help you keep healthy. You pay for this service and deserve to be comfortable with the arrangement.

One of the best ways to find someone you will be happy with is by asking around. Ask your friends and colleagues who they use. Many times local gay or lesbian organizations have lists of gay sympathetic providers. (There is a good list of providers in the Community Resources section of *Out in the Mountains*.) Find out the providers known to be homophobic and try to stay away from them. Even if you do not plan to come out to your provider, you will probably be uncomfortable with someone who is homophobic.

The next step is to interview. Before interviewing a prospective health care provider you need to decide what will be important to you in your relationship with this person. The questions of whether to "come out" to a health care provider looms large when deciding who to go to and what the relationship will be like. Many gay and lesbian people are fearful of talking honestly about their sexuality. In a recent study done at the University of Iowa, forty percent of the lesbians surveyed "thought that their health care would be adversely affected if their physician were aware of their sexual preference." Certainly

BODYWORKS

by Deborah Kutzko

in these times of increased homophobia, both lesbians and gay men have good reasons for these fears. Another concern is the effect that a breach of confidentiality might have on insurance companies, employers or family.

There are some good reasons, however, to be open with a potential health care provider. Certainly the main reason is so that you can receive accurate information and complete care. Also in many cases it feels better. Questions of next of kin and who is allowed to see you and care for you in the event of serious illness are best handled when clarity and openness are allowed.

Although our lives include more than our sexuality, complete health care should include attention to our sexual practices. For people with more than one sexual partner it is important to pay attention to the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases. For people who are not currently sexual or are sexual with one partner or themselves, there may be other problems or concerns that can be helped by talking to a health care provider.

It sometimes helps to make a list of questions that you can take with you when interviewing a potential health care provider. Your list might include the following:

- 1) Do you have many gay or lesbian clients?
- 2) How do you feel about working with gay and lesbian people?
- 3) Are you familiar with gay and lesbian health problems?
- 4) Who covers for you when you are not working?
- 5) Will my sexual preference be noted in my medical records?
- 6) Who else will have access to my medical records?

A major point to remember when choosing a medical provider is that you are the boss. If you are not getting what you need from a particular provider, it is your right to ask for it or to find a better person for the job.

Vigil of hope set for Memorial Day

On Monday, May 26, Vermonters will join with others across the nation in participating in a vigil against AIDS. The vigil will take place on the steps of the Vermont State House at 8:30 p.m. and will include brief speeches, music and a candlelight memorial. There will be an indoor location posted at the State House in case of rain.

Vigils and other related activities on Memorial Day regarding AIDS are

being spearheaded by a San Francisco based group - Mobilization Against AIDS. Here in Vermont, the vigil is being planned by a newly formed group - Vermont Committee for AIDS Resources, Education and Services (Vermont C.A.R.E.S.)

There will be more information about this organization in the June OITM. There will be a meeting of Vermont C.A.R.E.S. on Sunday, May 18. Contact 862-5917 for details.

HTLV-3 bill Dies In committee

The HTLV-III antibody discrimination bill has died in the Health and Welfare Committee of the Vermont House of Representatives. House Bill 622, which would have forbidden housing and employment discrimination on the basis of HTLV-III antibody test results, was never brought to a vote by the committee.

Rep. Toby Young (D-Westminster), the committee's chair, reported to supporters of the bill that she had brought the matter before the committee members and they showed no interest in reporting the bill to the full House. The lack of interest was attributed to the lateness of the session and the belief of many members that the bill would lose if sent to a House vote.

Terje Anderson, who co-ordinated lobbying on the bill, said that he was "disappointed, but not surprised" by the bill's fate. "We knew from the beginning that it would be an uphill fight."

Anderson maintained that despite the failure to pass the legislation, the effort was worthwhile. "Educating the legislature is not something which will happen overnight, but we made an impressive start with HB 622." He said that over 30 members of the legislature had told him they were impressed with the lobbying effort by the lesbian and gay community. "They said that the educational package we sent them, the hearing on the bill, and letters and phone calls from constituents were well-organized and highly informational. One state representative from a very rural, conservative district told me that he had received about a dozen letters and that the information packet was one of the best he'd ever seen."

"We may not have gotten the bill passed," said Anderson, "but we made a positive impression on the legislature. It is important that we start planning now to be back next year, perhaps with a more comprehensive package of AIDS-related legislation. If we plan ahead to co-ordinate a very thorough lobbying campaign, we can build on this year's very positive beginnings."

State Rep. K. Micque Glitman (D-Burlington), who sponsored HB 622, agreed. "Legislation rarely passes the first time through in Montpelier, but if you are persistent and work hard, you frequently can go somewhere with it."

Glitman advised supporters of the legislation to "start early and plan ahead" for the next legislature. She also stressed that "it is important that you let legislative candidates know that you are concerned about it when they are out campaigning for votes this fall. Nothing makes an impression on a politician like hearing from a voter."