

National/International News

Nation's Leading Medical Journal Refuses Ad from Gay Physicians

San Francisco CA The nation's most widely circulated medical journal has refused to accept an advertisement from a national gay and lesbian medical society, according to the physicians' group. The San Francisco-based American Association of Physicians for Human Rights (AAPHR) had attempted to place a full-page \$7,000 ad in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) warning physicians about the negative medical consequences of homophobia. JAMA rejected the ad, claiming in a written statement that its content was "political" and "not scientific."

Noting that JAMA accepted ads this year from such advertisers as Kellogg's and McDonald's, AAPHR Executive Director Benjamin Schatz, Esq., commented that "It's absurd for a publication that has accepted ads extolling the health benefits of Cocoa Crispies and fast food to reject an ad from a physician's group as unscientific. The fact is that our ad was a sober, scientific discussion of pressing health issues such as teen suicide, anti-gay violence, substance abuse and misdiagnoses of gay patients by poorly informed physicians."

Schatz also refuted JAMA's claim that it accepts only ads that are apolitical, noting that the journal has featured several ads this year from the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association criticizing drug price controls and from the military, recruiting physicians. "For gay physicians, excluded by the military's anti-gay policies, military recruitment ads in JAMA are intensely political. It is hypocritical for JAMA to accept ads from those who discriminate against gay physicians but to reject ads that attempt to expose such discrimination."

Oklahoma physician Larry Prater, MD, president of AAPHR, noted that "The biased rejection by a medical journal of an ad criticizing homophobia in medicine dramatically underscores the very need for the ad. The fact is that homophobia is a health hazard, and all physicians have an ethical obligation to combat it. AAPHR will continue to be at the forefront of these efforts."

Prater noted that AAPHR is encouraging gay and lesbian physicians and medical students to attend the AMA's annual meeting in Chicago June 13-15 to show their support for a resolution opposing sexual orientation-based discrimination by the AMA. Such a resolution has previously been rejected four times by the AMA, but stands "an excellent chance of passage" according to Dr. Prater.

AMA Adds Sexual Orientation to Non-Discrimination Policy

Chicago, IL After five years of trying, members of the American Medical Association (AMA) finally were able to pass a change to the association's bylaws prohibiting discrimination in membership on the basis of sexual orientation. The change, made by a voice vote of the 435 member House of Delegates which is the AMA's policy making body, followed debate in which some doctors argued that the association would be seen as "endorsing homosexual lifestyles" if it made the change. (*The New York Times*)

Domestic Partnership Benefits at Harvard and MIT

Cambridge, MA Within the last couple of months two more universities have joined the growing number of organizations which provide health benefits for domestic partners of their employees. Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have decided to provide the coverage for same-sex couples in a mutually exclusive relationship. In both cases coverage is not extended to unmarried heterosexual couples because they have the option to marry. At Harvard, benefits for domestic partners arose as an issue during contract negotiations in 1989 with the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers. A committee established by Harvard President Neil Rudenstine in October 1992 recommended the change saying it would enhance Harvard's ability to attract and retain high quality faculty and staff, eliminate compensation inequities and serve as an important practical and symbolic acknowledgment of the diversity of the University's workforce. (*Harvard Gazette, Boston Globe*)

Lewiston Referendum

Lewiston, ME. In November Lewiston Maine will vote on a referendum similar to the one defeated in Portland last year. Lewiston, like Portland passed a civil rights ordinance protecting lesbians and gays. Last November an effort to overturn Portland's ordinance was defeated. This November Lewiston will be the testing ground for a possible state-wide referendum. ▼

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