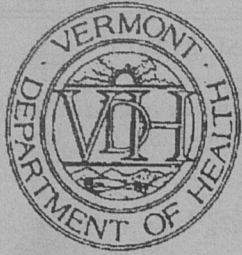


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health & wellbeing

The BLT (Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender) Health Network

BY JOY D. GRIFFITH

It was the end of February '98 when Ric Kadour, public relations expert, was the only person at VT Cares remembering that maybe it was time to do something about the Lesbians. A Lesbian Health Forum was quickly established at the Controis Auditorium at City Hall, and Lo!...Vermont weather suddenly appeared again reducing the four speakers scheduled to one and the audience to 15.

What came of the effort? A concerned group of Lesbians with multi-health interests and needs bonded for another meeting. These issues included everything from domestic violence in lesbian relationships (which exists with the same violence, secrecy, and fear as in heterosexual battering relationships) to the need of the series Hepatitis B shots for some lesbians unable to pay the expensive costs for this series.

What did we do? We met with members from the VT Cares board in March to zero in on one of our pressing issues; a lesbian's need to receive her Hepatitis B series shots "at cost" through VT Cares equally along with the gay men who are presently allocated this support. We were assured that if we called one week before the shots were scheduled, by April 3rd, the drug could be ordered for administering the following week. The phone call was

made in time and it is now the June publication of OITM's and the Lesbian in question still has not received her "needed at cost" Hepatitis B shots. Now you don't really want to know the rest of the story until we can find a happy ending to this accounting. But what you need to know is that VT Cares is allocated funds to address and help the lesbian health needs right along with the gay men health needs.

What have we seen each year regarding lesbian needs: A brochure during National Breast Cancer month on top of a table along with the condoms at the Men's Health Project fund raisers. Wow! Isn't that great? Even *Out In the Mountains* picked up on our needs before VT Cares did and OITM's has no money for anyone's health. Let's hope that one of our favorite lobbyists from Montpelier will do some real "digging" and not just listen to the VT Cares rhetoric when she starts asking some questions.

In the meantime, Lauren Corbett, M.S.W. met with the BLT at the April 27th meeting to offer us help through the Office of Minority Health. Corbett, with a small group of professionals, started a Lesbian Health Network group in 1995 and accomplished a vast compilation of information for and about Lesbians. They also developed a master list of 40 lesbians involved in health issues. Their "Lesbian Health Net-

work" focused on: 1. Getting data of lesbian health issues with an added intent to compare the data with National lesbian health issues, 2. To develop a list of health care providers safe for lesbians.

These providers could be of any orientation as long as they were sympathetic and knowledgeable of the special needs for lesbians. The Vermont Health Department will not establish such a provider list due to the possibility of political involvement, but an independent grass roots group may safely compile and protect such a list for those lesbians in need. (Reference: A National Lesbian/Gay Medical Association already exists called "The GayLesMed". Service is provided on a call by call basis and a name(s) of health care professionals in the caller's area will be given: (415) 255-4547.)

Corbett stated that two surveys were made in Vermont. The first survey was put out by Ladies First with only a small response (perhaps due to the survey not being promoted by lesbians). The second survey included youth which resulted in a larger response. (Very good, but once again the older dykes have been overlooked!)

However, the Vermont Health Commissioner stands firm on the GLBT community and is presently establishing a panel with representatives from all sections to participate in Montpelier meetings. Also, the Primary Care

Program at UVM presently has a survey out and from this the VT Health Dept. will develop a training program. Those trained could be receiving a special sticker to be displayed indicating good practice (re lesbian special needs).

The "Lesbian Health Network" faded at this point of two survey efforts showing such a small return and now "The BLT" has already issued a new survey through *The Goddess Times* with a larger, more comprehensive survey soon to be developed for the entire state. The BLT's present primary project is to compile a greater list of professional care providers from throughout the state and assess the health needs of the lesbian community. I have used the title "lesbian" deliberately when referring to the BLT Health Network, but be assured that this group is bisexual, lesbian and transgender. When the survey comes your way we hope all orientations will respond with their special needs.

Our next meeting will be held at the Peace and Justice Center on June 15, 1998 beginning at 7:00 P. M. All BLT's are invited to attend "their group" and help with the project. Look for our BLT letterhead in the Pride Guide! Come visit our table at Pride Day, June 20th on the waterfront! For further information or a copy of the present survey, phone: Joy (802) 848-7037 or Lanny (802) 899-4588

Curbside

