

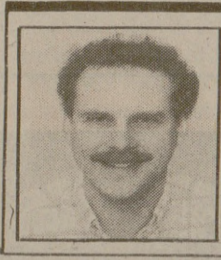
AIDS education sorely needed to stop disease

Texas A&M President William Mobley put the emphasis on education when announcing the University's AIDS policy Monday. Education is the issue, and it is badly needed. Indeed, research seems to indicate that many freshmen are woefully ignorant of even the basic facts about the disease.

Dr. Karl Hursey, of the psychology department, surveyed 508 A&M students in regard to their sexual behavior and attitudes. He presented a preliminary version of his results at a meeting of the Brazos Valley AIDS Foundation this summer. He found that although well over half of the students were sexually active, many of them knew little about AIDS. Here I present a few of the items he shared at the meeting.

Six-and-a-half percent of the students believed that vitamins and a proper diet could significantly help prevent AIDS. Gosh. Perhaps we should contact these folks to find out what other things vitamins can do.

How about not having sex with people who look like they might have AIDS? Just about two-thirds of the students (68 percent) agreed that such a measure could help prevent AIDS. I found this almost unbelievable. Let me state here for the record: HIV is mostly spread by people who look (and are, but for HIV



Jeff Farmer
Columnist

infection) perfectly healthy. You cannot tell, by looking at anyone, including yourself, whether the HIV is in that person's body. Period.

A few facts...

AIDS is a fatal disease, caused by HIV. This virus is spread by sexual contact, sharing needles, or from mother to child during pregnancy. To be completely safe avoid any activity that brings you into contact with the blood, semen or blood products of another person.

If you are sexually active you can significantly reduce your risk by always using a condom with a water-based lubricant and nonoxinol-9 whenever you engage in vaginal or anal intercourse. Although oral sex is not an efficient mode of transmission, using a condom can reduce your risk in this as well. These measures are also effective against other STD's.

Always use a clean needle for injections.

The Health Education Center of the A.P. Beutel Health Center offers programs on AIDS, HIV infection, STD's, Safe Sex in the '90's, and other health-related issues to classes and student organizations. Contact Dr. Erika Gonzalez-Lima, Coordinator, 845-1341.

For further information about AIDS, call the National AIDS Hotline 1-800-342-2437. For local information about testing or other issues, call 690-AIDS.

This next one is just as amazing. 73 percent of those surveyed said that avoiding people who might be gay could help prevent AIDS. More than half thought this would be a very effective measure. Good grief. Sitting next to a gay person in class may mean that you could catch a cold if they have one, or get your world view broadened, but it won't expose you to AIDS.

As Dr. Hursey said, what is scary about these results is not just that students are ignorant, but that much of what they think they know is wrong. People are much more likely to make a bad decision based on incorrect information than on no information at all. Folks who think that all they need to do is

"avoid gays" (whatever that means) are a lot more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior than are those who

understand the facts.

If this were one of those surveys about geography or politics that we are always hearing about, the results might be funny. As it is, it's not. The median age of persons answering the survey was 19; i.e., most were freshmen. This shows, for one thing, just what a rotten job high schools are doing in educating their students about AIDS. (Many high schools, due to parental pressure, do almost nothing.)

Sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS) are a serious threat to the college population. Half of all STD's each year occur in people under the age of 25. Unfortunately (in some sense) AIDS does not show up right away. So by the time someone who contracted

HIV infection in college actually develops symptoms of AIDS, they are

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usually far away. Since college students don't see their friends getting sick, they think they are immune. A significant

number of AIDS-related deaths in the 20-29 age group; given the time it takes this disease to progress, it is assumed that most of these people were infected by their early 20s.

The murders in Gainesville, Fla. involving a handful of students are receiving national attention (as per they should). But it's a safe bet that AIDS is a much bigger threat (though delayed one) on any campus of significant size. That's why the programs announced by President Mobley on Monday are vital. And why we should all take responsibility to educate ourselves and our friends, simply a matter of survival.

Jeff Farmer is a graduate student in mathematics.

MARGULIES
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Attention all readers: The Batt wants your input

Most of you new folks have probably figured out by now that The Battalion is Texas A&M's student newspaper. Most of you old hands have seen The Batt before and maybe think you've figured us out.

Well, we've changed a little. With a few new features, we've increased communication with you, our readers. When you pick up The Battalion, you won't just see what a lot of journalism majors and newspaper types think is interesting. You'll read about what students are interested in, what your friends are saying, how your peers feel about current issues.

Here are a few examples:
The Batt Poll — The results of our telephone survey, The Batt Poll, will appear in the paper every other Wednesday, starting Sept. 12. You may have seen the poll at the end of the Spring semester or during the summer — it's the one with the pie graphs.

The poll always includes two questions, chosen by the editor (that's me), on a current topic. The purpose is to find out how A&M students feel about certain issues. About 400 students are randomly called by a machine each time, and they respond to the questions by punching in numbers.

Cindy McMillian
Editor

We asked and here's what you said — This is another feature designed to sample average student opinion. Starting next week for the fall semester, a reporter and photographer will approach on campus ten random people and ask them for opinions on a current topic. The people's answers and their photographs will appear in The Battalion every other Wednesday, probably on Page 3.

An advantage to this type of survey is participants are allowed to express their thoughts rather than answer a multiple choice question. "We asked and here's what you said" began this summer and was well received.

BATTIPS — BATTIPS is an easy way for readers to submit story ideas to The Battalion. By calling 845-3315 and leaving a message on our machine, anyone can propose a story about an interesting student or faculty member, something different or disturbing on campus, an upcoming event or even a rumor they heard about the Aggies joining

the NFL. We'll look into it.

Yes, these tips do turn into actual stories. Several stories this summer were prompted by messages from readers, and a story in today's paper was the result of a BATTIP.

The BATTIPS number runs every day in the paper in a little box. Please call with your ideas, but please don't call and leave messages about events you want to appear in What's Up. What's Up submissions must be made in person. Which brings me to the next category...

What's Up and In Advance — What's Up runs every day, and it's a list of meetings, special lectures or other events occurring on campus. To get an item in What's Up for your organization, come to the Batt newsroom (216 Reed McDonald) and fill out a form. You must submit the form three days in advance of when you want it to appear in the paper.

Because of the enormous number of entries we receive and limited space, we unfortunately cannot guarantee every entry will run. But we do try.

In Advance usually runs two or three times a week and is similar to What's Up, but more in-depth. Background information about mass-appeal events, such as concerts or lectures by visiting experts, makes In

Advance an informative guide to what's coming to campus. Ideas for In Advance entries should be directed to our city editor, Holly Becka, at 845-3316. Again, we cannot guarantee every entry will run.

Salutes — Salutes is something The Battalion published in the past, and it has recently been brought back. Every Friday, the Salutes box will announce awards and honors received by A&M students, faculty, staff or organizations. Please let us know if you or someone you know has done something praiseworthy, and we'll put it in print.

For Salutes entries, come to 216 Reed McDonald, fill out a Salutes form and drop it in the big wooden box at the front. Be sure to bring submit entries by Tuesday to appear in Friday's paper.

The Opinion Page — You all know what that is; you're reading it. Page 2, the place where Aggies tell other Aggies that abortion is wrong, killing trees is wrong, parking is horrible and Highway 6 runs both ways.

Page 2 is a forum for ideas and opinions on an infinite variety of issues. It is probably the most important way that you — the reader — participate in the paper. If you have an opinion to express or you

think something you read on the page is completely stupid, write and tell us. If the letter is long and well written, it may become a Reader's Opinion column. All letters should be mailed to The Batt or delivered to the opinion editor, Ellen Hobbs, in 216 Reed McDonald.

The Batt Staff — Enough about these occasional submissions. What about people who want to work for The Batt?

Any student may apply for a staff position, even non-journalism majors. I'm an economics major, the managing editor is a computer science major and none of the opinion columnists are journalism majors.

If you want to work for The Batt, though, you're probably too late for this semester — fall staff was hired in April. Applications will be available in November for the Spring 1991 semester.

That's the short version of The Battalion And You. The Battalion is not just any newspaper, it's your newspaper. So contact BATTIPS, write a letter to the editor, answer the questions if you're called by The Batt Poll — communication and understanding at A&M can only improve if you do.

The Battalion

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

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Adventures In Cartooning

by Don Atkinson Jr.

