



International Day Against Homophobia focuses on health care – May 17, 2008

This edition of the *Pride Pages* is dedicated to the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAH). The theme of the 2008 campaign is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) health. For HEU's Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee, this ties in nicely with our own *Out There for Medicare* campaign.

Highlighting LGBT issues for workers and patients/clients in our health care and social services work sites goes hand-in-hand with our ongoing defense of public medicare for all members of society.

This article, reprinted in part from the Fondation Émergence's (the Canadian group behind the IDAH) website, touches on some of the important health issues facing the LGBT community.

CAMPAIGN 2008

Each year, worldwide campaigns against homophobia culminate on May 17 with the International Day Against Homophobia. As it traditionally does every year, the Fondation Émergence suggests that the new 2008 campaign puts front and centre one particular sector of human activity. This year, it will be health care.

Just like any other citizens, the LGBT community needs to receive health services free of discrimination, and feel comfortable in consulting a health care professional.

HOMOSEXUALITY IS NOT A SICKNESS!

Homosexuality is not a sickness. However, specialists haven't always thought so. For a long time, mental health professionals considered sexual activity between same-sex partners an illness. They listed homosexuality among mental illnesses in the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) used by the American Psychiatric Association, an internationally recognized organization. It wasn't until December 15, 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the Association's reference manual. This decision is reflected in the DSM-III published in 1980.

During an annual Board of Trustees meeting held in January 1975, the American Psychological Association did likewise by passing a resolution to remove homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses and emotional disorders for good. In 1996, the Canadian Psychological Association followed suit by adopting several resolutions based on the same principle.

HEALTH CARE

The goal of the *Homosexuality is not a sickness!* campaign is to reach all health care workers. They work in many environments that affect the entire population: hospitals, care centres, pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, child welfare organizations, detention centres, learning institutions, medical clinics, assisted reproduction clinics, and day care centres, providing a range of services such as home care, social services, rehabilitation, domestic violence, and suicide prevention.

PREJUDICE

Prejudice against homosexuals is nothing new, nor is it easy to fight. It's sad to say that even though homosexuality is not a disease, issues concerning the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and a Health Canada policy ban on donating blood and organs reinforce prejudice by associating disease with sexual activity between same-sex partners.

Other discussions highlighted in the IDAH campaign include addictions, procreation, aging, mental health (including depression), and coming out to health care professionals.

For more information, visit <www.homophobiaday.org>.

International Day Against HOMOPHOBIA



Discrimination: gay organs and blood rejected



TIM RATTEL
Editorial

Around the age of 21, when I was first coming to terms with my sexuality, I came upon a Red Cross blood drive at the local mall. Giving blood was something I had wanted to do, but hadn't pursued until this spontaneous moment. It felt like a moral and civic duty, so I cued up for a little personal pain for some stranger's gain.

Completing the requisite questionnaire, I was shocked to come across the question: "Are you a gay man?" I hadn't expected that. After a moment's hesitation of revealing to total strangers – in a suburban mall – that intimate part of myself that I had only recently embraced (I considered lying, not knowing how they would react), I marked YES.

I felt nervous, proud and excited to stand up publicly for the first time, and identify as a member of the LGBT community. The nurse took one look at my bold confession and pronounced me ineligible to give blood. No pain, nobody's gain. I don't recall being angry so much as hurt; partly relieved that I was forever more absolved from performing this civic duty of donating blood.

Of course, it is an issue of HIV transmission. Certainly, we all know the horrible history of tainted blood that plagued the Red Cross and those who received it. Naturally, anyone can be a carrier of HIV. It certainly is not an exclusively gay male disease. Every donor's blood should be tested, and therefore no one need be excluded from donation based on their sexuality.

ASSUMPTIONS OF PROMISCUITY ARE HOMOPHOBIC

The same assumption has prompted the federal government to restrict gay men from donating organs. It's irrelevant whether or not a straight person has multiple

sex partners, yet gay men are singled out as the only non-monogamous group.

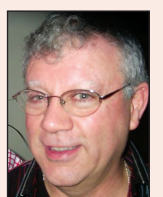
The same homophobia has led some media and right-wing groups to declare a new gay epidemic: MSRA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus), a potentially fatal, antibiotic resistant staph infection, also known as a "super bug". This fear-mongering is solely based on the misrepresentation of a scientific study. With the proliferation of "scientific studies" today, individuals must be critical in interpreting them and take fragments and synopses published by the media with a grain of salt.

Assumptions cause homophobia. HEU's membership is a model of diversity. We must all resist painting any group with one brush.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- 28 per cent of HEU facilities report that there is no formal training on human rights policies and procedures at their work sites?
- 71 per cent report there is no awareness provided to staff on LGBT health issues?
- 57 per cent responded that same-sex partners are listed as "other" rather than spouse?

* Source: the HEU Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee Survey on human rights policies. The full report is available on the HEU website, under the Human Rights section.



BERT MUNN
co-chair



Educational opportunities for LGSC members



Debbie Lawrance with B.C. Fed president Jim Sinclair at Canadian Labour Congress Winter School this past January.

Both Tim Rattel and Debbie Lawrance had the honour of training at the HEU Provincial Office to become member facilitators. After a week-long session in teaching skills and leading discussions, their first assignment was to teach a day class on Union Activism to fellow HEU members.

Also, the LGSC would like to congratulate Debbie Lawrance on receiving the B.C. Federation of Labour's Donna Sheaves Memorial Scholarship for the "Women in Leadership" course at the Canadian Labour Congress Winter School in January.

"It was an honour and a privilege to attend this phenomenal course," says Lawrance. "It was life-enriching in many ways."

HEU nominated for community award

Every now and then, one's achievements and hard work are recognized. HEU's Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee is extremely honoured to have been nominated for an AccolAIDS award this year in the "Social, Political, Community Action" category.



The annual awards and dinner gala – hosted by the B.C. Persons with AIDS Society (BCPWA) in April – is one of the largest fundraisers for the organization, and recognizes groups and individuals who make a difference in the community and the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.

We would like to express our appreciation to Dr. Iain Mackie, MD., FRCP (General Internal Medicine, University of British Columbia) for nominating the committee, and a special thank-you to Sister Debbie Lawrance, who works tirelessly to promote our committee's work.

For more information, go to <www.bcpwa.org>.

Committee Report

HEU's Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee (LGSC) is in the midst of an exciting and busy time. We've identified a number of HEU, community and labour events that the LGSC can be active in this year to build allies and raise awareness about issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people both in the workplace and in our communities.

In early 2008, the LGSC began work on a major campaign tying into the May 17: International Day Against Homophobia (IDAH). This national, annual event is sponsored by the Quebec-based Fondation Émergence. The foundation provides resources and materials to aid organizations in educating their respective constituents. This year's campaign theme is LGBT issues in health care.

As B.C.'s biggest health care union, the identified theme for 2008 was a natural fit for HEU's LGSC to take on a leadership role. A big impetus for the campaign was our committee co-chair Darlene Bown's personal experience where a gay couple was not treated as a family unit when one partner was admitted to hospital. Devastating and hurtful experiences like this are not uncommon, and highlight that homophobia is still active in hospitals, in retirement homes, and in the delivery of health care and social services.

The LGSC is thrilled to be moving forward on a multifaceted campaign related to the International Day Against Homophobia.

On May 12, the committee is co-sponsoring the Vancouver LGBT Centre's annual IDAH Breakfast, bringing together community leaders to create awareness on LGBT health issues. In addition to educating our own HEU

membership, we are in a unique position to provide the perspective of those employed in health care and draw attention to our ongoing *Out There for Medicare* campaign.

Also, in conjunction with Vancouver's LGBT Centre, the committee has published four "Health Matters" pamphlets dealing with LGBT health issues for community distribution.



In February, the LGSC sent out a service delivery and human

rights survey to HEU-organized health care employers. The goal was to identify how the LGBT community's health needs are being met and what protections are in place to ensure respectful health care delivery. Hopefully, the survey results will enable the committee to develop some suggestions for improvement and guidelines for sensitivity to the LGBT community.

In May, we will be distributing the Fondation Émergence posters and pamphlets to HEU locals and community groups.

We hope our HEU sisters and brothers will take time on May 17 to reflect on the relationship between homophobia and health care, as we endeavour to resist all forms of bigotry and prejudice at work, at home and in our communities.

Tim Rattel

LGSC ISSUES AND INFORMATION LINE

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! *Did you know that we have...?*

- a confidential HEU LGBT Issues and Information telephone line: **604-456-7192, ext. 3**, or toll-free **1-800-663-5813 ext. 7192**
- an HEU pride website – www.pridepages.org
- a quarterly newsletter, *Pride Pages*
- a Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee that meets three to four times a year to work on all types of things for you
- community events and campaigns that all are invited to attend or become involved in
- an equity conference every two years with registration open to all LGBT members

Email us at glesbian@heu.org, phone us at **604-456-7192, ext. 3** or call toll-free at **1-800-663-5813 ext. 7192**.

ALL CALLS ARE CONFIDENTIAL.