

AIDS hysteria unfounded, doctors say

By Dan Bodene
staff writer

IMAGINE THIS for the plot of a medical movie thriller: People begin developing a new, fatal and incurable disease begins.

Although few contract the disease, hysteria begins to develop among the millions of people who have little or no chance of catching the illness. Keep imagining: Widespread fear of the illness begins to disrupt medical services. Misinformation and rumors grow. Doctors must cope with a deluge of worried callers who have convinced themselves they have the malady.

SCIENCE FICTION? No, unfortunately. The very real disease is called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). But the greatest threat posed to most people by AIDS isn't medical, it's psychological, according to many physicians.

Local physicians, for example, are more worried about the fuss over AIDS than they are about the disease itself. Dr. John Jovanovich of Henry Ford Hospital's West Bloomfield Outpatient Center is a specialist in internal medicine and the treatment of infectious diseases. In March, he attended a national conference on AIDS at New York University Medical Center. He learned that the people least likely to contract AIDS are most afraid of it.

"THERE ARE a lot of misconceptions," he said. "It is not as common as people think. There have been no cases in this area. A few suspicions, but no confirmations."

Dr. Evelyn Fisher, a Southfield res-

ident who works at Henry Ford Hospital-Detroit, said, "We want people to understand that they're not at risk of contracting the disease simply by being around an AIDS patient or by donating blood."

"The disease does not spread through the air, by just touching someone with AIDS, sharing meals or living quarters with someone who has AIDS."

Pathologist Molly Tan Hayden, who directs the blood bank at William Beaumont Hospital-Troy, said recent publicity has given lot of potential blood donors "the mistaken impression that one can catch AIDS by giving blood."

"You cannot get it by giving blood," she said. "In fact, the risk of catching it by receiving a transfusion is only one per million at this point."

BEFORE THE July 4 holiday, when blood supplies across the United States already were low, Red Cross drives suffered even more because potential donors were afraid of catching the disease. Doctors at Henry Ford Hospital were forced to postpone major surgeries because of the blood shortage.

Dr. William Shafer, director of Southeast Red Cross Blood Services, said the shortage was the worst he's seen in nine years at his post.

"The problem was solely related to the AIDS hysteria," Shafer said. "We have had a great deal of difficulty with hysteria, fear and the unfounded conclusion that people have that they can get AIDS from donating blood."

NOW, IN SOME cities, police and rescue personnel are avoiding all types of contact that possibly might expose them to the risk of contracting



Nurse Mary Shell (middle) from Henry Ford Hospital-West Bloomfield Center checks on two volunteers, Janice Paschko (left) and Amy Haffey, who donated blood. Local officials from

Red Cross Blood Services worry about the "unfounded conclusion" that people can get the disease AIDS from donating blood.

AIDS. The disease also has attracted widespread media attention and has become a favorite subject of moral and political debate.

Jovanovich said the sheer lack of knowledge of AIDS is what makes it so fearful to so many people.

"People think it's really infectious. But it can only be contracted through blood and blood products, or by intimate sexual contact."

"More people have died from AIDS than from Legionnaire's Disease or Toxic Shock Syndrome. There was not a lot done about AIDS initially."

The number of cases in the general area is tough to pin down, Jovanovich said. There has been one in Detroit and two in Ann Arbor, he said. "But I question whether we're seeing just the worst cases."

THERE HAS BEEN a lot of local

interest in the disease, Jovanovich said. As a guest on a recent Sunday morning radio program in Detroit, he was swamped with calls at 7 a.m.

"I couldn't believe it. Calls were stacked up five at a time."

A national toll-free hotline for information on AIDS received 100 calls the first day. (The number is 1 (800) 342-AIDS.)

"The big thing is that people have

to be educated," Jovanovich said. "It's just silly for people not to donate blood."

The American Red Cross now issues a pamphlet to all prospective blood donors asking them not to donate if they think there's a risk the donation may infect a patient with any of several infectious diseases. AIDS is listed along with hepatitis, syphilis and malaria.

Lack of knowledge a basis for AIDS panic

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) apparently has existed for only a few years.

In the medical parlance it's "a new disease entity of unknown origin," according to Dr. John Jovanovich of Henry Ford Hospital's West Bloomfield Outpatient Center.

Basically, AIDS short-circuits the body's immunization system. AIDS victims cannot fight off infections and other diseases, especially cancers.

Jovanovich, a specialist in internal medicine and the treatment of infectious diseases, makes an analogy between AIDS and a city trying to operate without any police and fire protection.

THE EFFECT OF AIDS is similar to that of T-cell leukemia, a rare cancer of the blood in which disease-fighting cells die off.

The controversy surrounding AIDS partly stems from the nature of most

of its victims. AIDS primarily strikes homosexual and bisexual men, drug users, Haitian immigrants and hemophiliacs.

More than 70 percent of AIDS victims are male homosexuals. AIDS first surfaced in gay communities in New York and San Francisco, but because of the social stigma attached to homosexuality it was years before any serious attention was paid to the disease.

IT TOOK INTENSE lobbying from

the organized gay community to rally support for AIDS research. That ushered in the moral and political issues; friction between those affected with the disease, and those who saw it as some sort of "divine punishment" for homosexuality.

Oddly enough, the disease is not limited to homosexuals. It has been noted in users of illegal intravenous drugs, who have contracted it from contaminated needles. It also has been seen in Haitians, who have de-

nied homosexuality and drug use. Hemophiliacs face increased risk from AIDS because it is suspected the disease can be transmitted in blood-clotting factor preparations.

Almost 1,600 persons have contracted AIDS in the United States since 1979, when mortality statistics on the disease began. No one who was diagnosed with AIDS in 1979 is alive today. There are fewer and fewer survivors diagnosed in years hence. The total death toll is more than 500.

SINCE THE DISEASE has an undetermined incubation time in the body, infections that occur today may not be discovered for years.

Symptoms of AIDS are remarkably vague. They include fatigue, weight loss, night sweats and swollen glands — symptoms common to hundreds of sicknesses ranging from stress reactions to pneumonia.

For more information, call the Michigan Organization for Human Rights at 855-7255.

INSIDE ANGLES

OFFERINGS RECEIVED by Salem United Church of Christ through its Vacation Church School (July 25-29) have been earmarked for the church mission project "Books for Zimbabwe." The church is participating in the project designed by the United Church Board for World Ministries to develop libraries in the African mission schools. Goal for the board is 10,000 plus sets of used books, encyclopedias and magazine subscriptions to help rebuild the schools after a 14 year war for independence took its toll in lives, property, medical and educational facilities.

BEVERLY ANN SHARETTE, of Farmington Hills, graduated summa cum laude from the University of Detroit, College of Liberal Arts with a bachelor of science degree in social work. Congratulations, Beverly.

FALCON BOOSTER Club members are doing their darndest to line up a school administrator who will be willing to take a turn sitting in the Dunk Tank the club will be manning during Founder's Festival days. The boosters who support athletic programs in Farmington High School say they have students as well as teachers lined up for their pitcher-patrons for the July 28-30 event. Will an administrator step forward, please.

LAKES FOR CANOEING and non-power boating are located at Addison Oaks County Parks in Oxford, Independence Oaks in Clarkston and Groveland Oaks in Holly. Rowboats and pedal boats can be rented at all these parks. Canoes can also be rented at Independence Oaks and Groveland Oaks. For more information, call 858-0906.

TARGET DATE is Sunday, Sept. 11, for members of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church to move into their new facilities at 25225 Middlebelt Road. It was just one year ago the parish started "phase 2" of its building program, which began with the burning of the land contract. At last report they were better than 350 names to be inscribed on the new buildings commemorative plaque representing the donations given for the building fund.

CONGRATULATIONS to Charlietta Mangrum, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Mangrum and a graduate of North Farmington High School, who has been selected to the prestigious honor society, the Mortar Board. Mortar Board is a national honor society of college seniors. She is a Merit Honor student majoring in chemistry and premedical studies and has been honored on the dean's list for each eligible term. As part of her medical orientation, Charlietta has been employed at Madison Community Hospital serving in both patient care and administrative positions to further her commit-

ment and knowledge in the medical field.

LARK SAMOUELIAN, executive director of Southwestern Oakland Cable Consortium, announced the officers for the Public Access Committee. They are Patrick Brunett of Novi, Jim Mitchell of Farmington and Carol Bauer of Novi.

JAMES D. LANDSBERG, of Farmington Hills, has been promoted to tax manager at the accounting firm of Arthur Andersen & Co. James joined the firm in 1978 after graduating from the University of Detroit Law School.

TIMOTHY M. CLEARY, of Farmington Hills, has been named vice-president of sales at International Business Expositions Inc. He is now responsible for marketing and sales nationally for the nation's largest business-to-business trade show. He is a board member for the Catholic Youth Organization and a graduate of the University of Michigan.

CAROL COX, daughter of Mrs. Mary Sue Cox of Farmington Hills, has received a doctor of medicine degree from Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine. She is taking a residency in psychiatry at Sinai Hospital of Detroit.

RICHARD LUKEY has been promoted to the post of associate research director of Leo Burnett Co. Inc. He graduated from Michigan State University in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in advertising. In 1976, he received a master's degree in advertising from Michigan State.

SUSAN K. BLOMQUIST, daughter of Mr. Alfred P. Blomquist of Farmington Hills, is one of 192 students who earned a place on the dean's list for the spring semester at Taylor University, Ind.

KIMBERLY TRABBITT of Farmington Hills has been selected to attend a unique music camp in Europe this summer. She is one of 130 American and Canadian high school students who will attend Blue Lake in Bavaria in July and August. Kimberly is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Trabbitt. Blue Lake in Bavaria is located in southern Germany southwest of Munich near the village of Oberammergau which is in the foothills of the Alps. While on tour, members of the Blue Lake in Bavaria Symphonic Bands will live with European families in each community they visit, giving them an opportunity to become acquainted with the people in each country and become aware of their way of life. Have a great time Kimberly.

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