

AIDS and AFRAIDS:

Education can stem hysteria, keep employers out of court

By Bill Parker
staff writer

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome — more popularly known as AIDS.

The mere mention of the disease causes panic in many people, and the possibility of working side-by-side with someone infected by it often causes instant hysteria in the workplace.

To stem the fear generated by the disease, information must be made available by the employer to inform the workforce of the danger, or lack of it, of working with an AIDS patient.

That was the theme of a recent management symposium on AIDS in the workplace — titled "AIDS and AFRAIDS" — sponsored by the Employers Association of Detroit, in cooperation with the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce and the United Community Services, at the Engineering Society of Detroit.

Because there is no evidence that individuals infected with AIDS pose any risk of transmitting the virus to co-workers, those infected with the virus can not legally be

restricted from working simply because of the infection.

Because of lack of education, at both the white-collar and blue-collar levels of employment, legal proceedings have taken place. Cases have stemmed from AIDS victims being fired and co-workers of AIDS victims seeking protection from what they feel are contaminated working conditions.

MANY OF THESE cases need not even have gone to court had educational programs about the disease been offered in the workplace, according to attorney Henry W. Saad.

Attorneys Saad — of Dickinson, Wright, Moon, Vandusen and Freeman — and David Plontkowsky — of Pearlman & Plontkowsky — held a debate at the symposium in an attempt to answer the legal questions surrounding AIDS in the workplace. Both attorneys agreed that most answers were complex and differed depending on the individual case.

AIDS victims are protected legally under legislation banning discrimination based on handicap.

"An employee cannot be discriminated against by virtue of handicap regulations and may continue to work unless the disability interferes with the person's ability to perform his duties," Saad said. "If there is a risk that the person may cause injury to others, the employer has every right to refuse employment. But only if there is reasonable likelihood."

Because the virus isn't transmitted through casual contact, it is difficult to prove there is a health risk to someone working alongside an AIDS patient.

The fact that someone has AIDS is not in itself grounds for dismissal. Only work-related consequences provide such grounds.

PLONTKOWSKY added that under the employee's right to be free of discrimination based on handicap there can be no pre-employment health tests that do not directly relate to the individual's ability to perform his or her job. Also, potential mishandling or misinterpretation of positive findings of a test could subject the individual to invasion of privacy and unjust discrimination or harassment.

It was also pointed out that employees do not have the right to know a fellow employee is infected with AIDS as long as the employer has no reasonable cause to think the disease will be transmitted throughout the workforce.

Employers should be aware that when dealing with AIDS there is enormous potential for an outbreak of fear among workers. The best way to avoid this outbreak of "AFRAIDS" is to educate employees with the most recent and updated information about AIDS.

According to a recent Michigan Employment Security Commission ruling, it is the responsibility of the employer to educate the workforce to the dangers of working with an AIDS patient to avert an outbreak of hysteria.

"The main effort is to educate the workforce to prevent any court case before it even starts."

Since medical experts are discovering more and more about the disease with each passing week, information should be updated to keep employees informed on recent medical findings about AIDS.

Health care industry sees treatment costs rising

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

As devastating as AIDS can be to the general population, a secondary threat is emerging in the cost of caring for people with AIDS.

The total hospital bill for the first 10,000 cases of AIDS in the country topped \$1.4 billion, according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

The bill includes the cost of 1.6 million hospital days, or 160 days spent in the hospital by each patient. The average Medicaid expenditure for each patient, the most common source of payment for AIDS treatment, was \$52,000 for 20 months of care.

PATIENTS WITH AIDS live an average of two years.

By March of this year, 135 cases of AIDS had been diagnosed in Michigan, resulting in 72 deaths. The majority of these cases were in Wayne County, and authorities agree that while the number of AIDS cases in Michigan is lower than expected, this number is just the tip of the future iceberg.

And J.R. Beaubouef, an analyst with the Michigan Insurance Bureau, is not certain \$52,000 is enough to cover the actual medical costs an AIDS patient incurs during the course of the illness.

"It is just too early to tell," he said. "Predictions vary upward to \$150,000 per patient."

One reason why, Beaubouef added, is because AIDS manifests itself through other diseases, like pneumonia, that increase the cost of medical care, making it extremely difficult

AIDS

to pinpoint an exact figure spent specifically on AIDS treatment.

Currently, Beaubouef said, private medical insurance pays hospitalization and physician care, but does not pay for experimental treatment. Since so little is known in the treatment of AIDS, much that is done falls into the experimental category.

The extent of insurance coverage in the future, Beaubouef said, will ultimately be based upon exact costs in treating AIDS. "The level of benefits won't be decided until there is enough data to draw conclusions."

Beaubouef also said the insurance

bureau suggests insurance companies use only two criteria in determining whether to insure high-risk individuals — whether a person has AIDS or has ever before been treated for the disease.

Ernie Thomas, an agent and co-owner of the Alexander & Thomas Insurance Agency in Farmington Hills, said this is the case now. "Insurance carriers are looking at the medical history of a person with AIDS in the same light as any person with a catastrophic illness, like cancer or heart disease. That person is basically uninsurable."

THESE POINTS, as well as many others, were debated by Beaubouef and others who served on the finance subcommittee of Gov. Blanchard's Expert Panel on AIDS.

Laura Redutey represented the Michigan Hospital Association on the committee. She said after "many months of deliberations," committee members submitted recommendations to Blanchard last April.

The recommendations do not mandate life and health insurance coverage for high-risk individuals, but do recommend making such coverage available until more specifics about costs are known.

The report also recommended further study on costs of treatment and care that will eventually be assumed by the Michigan Departments of Social Services and Public Health and the Greater Detroit Area Health Council.

The governor has already acted on another recommendation, budgeting \$1 million for education and training of Michigan medical personnel about AIDS. In certain instances, such as at Betsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills, staff educational seminars on the subject have already been held.

ANOTHER AREA hospital, Henry Ford in Detroit, is recognized as a specialty center for AIDS victims, and staff physician Dr. Evelyn Fisher is recognized as one of the leading experts on the disease in the country.

Fisher believes Michigan has the facilities and programs in place to meet both the current and future demands for treatment of the disease. Comprehensive referral systems like Wellness Networks (876-3582) in Detroit exist throughout the state, speakers bureaus continually educate the public and medical person-

nel, and at least a half-dozen hospitals are specially equipped to treat AIDS patients.

While the majority of these facilities are located in Michigan's larger cities like Detroit, support groups quietly function in many suburbs and may be located through city-based referral agencies.

There is little question the future demand on existing services and facilities will increase significantly. Infectious disease specialists project that the incidence of AIDS cases will increase 10-fold in the next five years.

Complicating the problem, Fisher said, is the possibility that promising new drugs currently being tested for AIDS may extend life "considerably." But whether this will result in an extension of life in a relatively healthy state or simply prolong illness is not yet known.

And she predicts these new drugs will be expensive. "They will cost a fortune, \$1,000 a month or more."

BUT THE FACTOR that Fisher said complicates the issue most is "fear," and the resulting reluctance of community support systems like nursing homes and hospices to step in to assist AIDS patients when these services are appropriate.

Fisher said it is not unusual in Michigan for AIDS patients to spend an additional six months to a year in an acute care hospital when intensive home care or a chronic care facility would be a more humane and less-costly alternative.

There is much a community can do. Wellness House in Detroit (not affiliated with Wellness Network) is a good example. The House will be a supervised living arrangement for people with AIDS who are unable to maintain their own housing either for financial or physical reasons.

Ship-shape

Transporting cargo is suburban agents' domain

By Carolyn Smith
staff writer

A steamship glides over a glistening body of water, its form accented against a clear blue sky and by other sailing vessels dwarfed by its imposing presence.

A freight train chugs over railroad tracks, a seemingly endless series of box-like boxcars shielding contents from the observer's natural sense of curiosity.

What's in them? Where were they loaded? And where in the world are they going? Only transportation agents, many of them in suburban

Detroit, know for sure. They are the ones who arrange the booking and routing of freight via ocean liner, rail and truck.

Because the international balance of trade favors the importers, most area shipping agents work together, said Dan Gregg, owner of Global International Shipping in Troy.

"We're a fraternal group that discusses the overall market every month in meetings at different restaurants in and around Detroit."

Gregg also is president of the 65-member Ocean Freight Agents Association of Detroit.

The trade deficit, he said, has been

hovering lately around \$18 billion a month.

"In some cases, we will ship out empty containers for foreign countries to fill. Steamship lines absorb the cost of shipping containers because they know it's inherent to the trade deficit," Gregg said.

CONTAINERS are steel or aluminum boxes, 8 feet tall by 8 feet wide, and either 20 or 40 feet long. Using them to load and transport cargo is far more efficient, agents say, than the old bulk-loading process by which commodities were sent down a chute through a ship's sidehatch and into a bin. Although bulk loading is still done this way, containers have changed the transport industry, agents say.

"The container virtually revolutionized the bulk process by reducing its turnaround time by 70 percent," explained William Hardy, general manager of World Shipping in Westland. Invented in the early '50s, the container didn't make a dramatic impact until the mid-'60s, he said.

Besides offering efficiency, the container is adaptable to what's known in the trade as "intermodal" transit. That means cargo in a container can be placed on a truck, a freight car or an ocean liner.

Bill Lickert, sales manager for Seapac Services in Troy, gives an example familiar to him and his company: Beans grown in Singapore are placed in cleanly scrubbed containers, trucked to Detroit, loaded on a Canadian Pacific freight car headed for Montreal, then put on a vessel for a port in England.

AGENTS CLAIM convenience to the customer is a major marketing tool. "In our industry, time is money," Hardy said.

That's why most agents offer shippers a door-to-door service that may cost a little more but spare a merchant from losing sales for lack of available goods. Trucking goods from the point of origin to their final destination is an example of this service.

American President Lines, a transportation company with a sales office in Southfield, imports clothing

in garment containers, said Harriet Seward, manager of the Cleveland home office.

"It's very convenient to get the clothing from such places as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan or India, then be able to move it directly to a U.S. retailer. The clothing is already on hangers, so there's no trouble at all," she said.

About 35 agents in the Detroit area arrange for call at the Port of Detroit, and most of them use it for shipping bulk scrap iron and auto parts. Agents claim the \$25,000 to \$35,000 a day it costs to run a vessel makes use of the Detroit port too expensive. So they are more likely to transport freight by rail or truck to U.S. eastern or western ports.

"It would take a good two weeks to run a vessel down the (St. Lawrence) Seaway to the Port of Detroit, so shipping from either coast is less costly and very practical," said Douglas Dymmel, office manager of Maersk Lines Agency, Southfield.

LINDA BARNES, deputy director of the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority, said officials are encouraging more vessels to come into the port, making them available to shippers on a more timely basis.

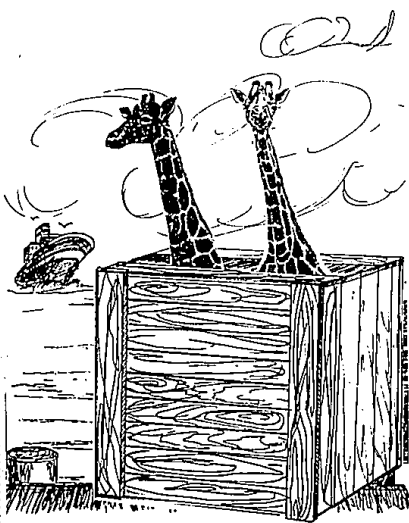
"We also recognize the realistic and competitive alternatives in intermodal transit, whether they be by rail or truck. Port activities are not restricted by regulation," she said.

Walter VanderVeer, rail division manager of CSX Transportation in Livonia, said he handles about 3,000 rail cars a day in Michigan alone. CSX, a Fortune 500 company, also deals with customers who are not on rail lines.

"If a customer wants to ship only by truck, we'll do it," VanderVeer said. "If he wants a combination of truck, rail and voyage, we'll do that too. We don't want him to worry about dealing with three or four companies. We're very much into one-stop shipping."

Most agents claim they will import or export anything that's legal and so end up shipping everything from soup to threaded nuts. Some-

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