

AIDS

'How do you tell your friends you're dying?'

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The piano music of George Winston drones softly in the background as Ed Jenks, 38, sits at the kitchen table with his dog Sam near his side.

He waits. Like a reported 26,566 people in the United States, Jenks has AIDS. The question is not if but when he will die. The mortality rate of the disease, which attacks the body's immune system, is 100 percent.

No cure is available. At what time and in what way Jenks contracted AIDS were not the main issues when he received test results in February that showed that he had the disease.

"My basic concern," Jenks said, "was how do you tell your closest friends that you're dying? That's the hardest part."

DAY-TO-DAY existence is not easy either. Those suffering with the disease get worse. The body slowly deteriorates until it can no longer defeat diseases that a healthy immune system overcomes naturally.

Some days, Jenks, a Detroit, said he feels well enough to go to work. Other days he spends anywhere from 14 to 16 hours sleeping and with fevers of 102.5 degrees.

It's the good days that give him a ray of hope. It's the bad days that bring him back to reality.

It also brings him to anger. For Jenks, the disease has struck at the most inopportune time. His life, he said, was just beginning to come together.

JENKS HAD just begun a second career teaching second grade after 11 unsatisfying years as a pharmacist.

His new career, though, was to last only three months before he received the news that he had AIDS.

Jenks was tested for the AIDS virus by his physician while being treated for a bad cold. He tested positive.

His physician suggested he be tested again, and again, he tested positive.

"I still wasn't afraid I had AIDS," Jenks said. "I suspected it when I started to get short of breath and was tired all the time."

A third test came back positive for pneumocystis carinii (a form of pneumonia associated with AIDS), "that's when I got scared."

"That's a death sentence."

FAMILY and friends, he said, were very supportive when he told them he had the disease. He had heard the horror stories of other people with AIDS — fired from their jobs, kicked out of their apartments or shunned by their families.

Fortunately, he said, that hasn't been the case for him.

"What I haven't gotten from anybody is the panic of 'Oh my God, I'm going to catch AIDS from this person by talking to them or by looking at them,'" Jenks said.

BUT KNOWLEDGE about AIDS is something even he didn't have, in the beginning. Jenks, a homosexual, wasn't concerned when AIDS was first discovered.

"I didn't think it could happen to me," he said. "It was a New York or San Francisco problem, not a Detroit problem. I continued to do the things that would put me at risk to catch it."

Jenks, like many AIDS carriers, isn't sure when he contracted the disease.

"That's what bothers me the most," he said. "I don't know when I contracted the virus and God knows how many people I infected."



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Ed Jenks never thought he'd be a victim of AIDS.

HE LIVES with that along with thoughts of his impending fate. Friends and family offer an ear so he can tell them his problems.

They also help Jenks with household and other tasks when he's not feeling well enough to do them himself.

Jenks is being treated at Henry Ford Hospital by Dr. Evelyn Harris, a widely recognized expert on the disease.

Talking to people, professionals or

friends, about the disease helps alleviate the burden somewhat.

At first, Jenks interacted with other AIDS patients but found it too disturbing.

"I don't anymore because it's like staring yourself in the face," he said.

"I knew this guy, I'll call him Joe, who had his appointment at Ford Hospital right after mine. When I first saw him, he looked thin."

"I saw him again last Thursday and he looked really bad. I just don't need to see that."

Schools grapple with delicate issues

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Where are the questions about AIDS to be answered? A recent report by the U.S. Attorney General's Office recommends AIDS education begin as early as elementary school.

Most school districts in the area touch on the disease in junior high or high school health courses.

Some school superintendents, though, wonder how much information on AIDS can be taught without invoking a negative community response.

"To what degree will the community receive that education with all the factors involved... you're getting into a delicate area," said Graham Lewis, superintendent of Farmington schools.

POLICIES on how to handle students who might have AIDS differ only slightly from school district to school district. Most are following the guidelines passed down from the federal Centers for Disease Control and the Michigan Department of Health.

The guidelines suggest each case should be handled individually by a team composed of the family's doctor, a public health official, school personnel and the child's parent or guardian, according to Wanda Jubb, health education specialist with the Michigan Department of Education.

"We advise schools of the evidence that there's no casual transmission of the disease," said Dr. E.J. McClendon, a professor of Public Health at U-M and school board president of Plymouth/Canton Schools. "There is no documented case... This is a good reason not to exclude children who might have AIDS from school."

McClendon also is on several state task forces and advisory committees regarding school policies on AIDS. He said the state recommends schools work out the specific details, using the guidelines.

Many school districts in the area, such as Wayne-Westland, Garden City, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills and Clarencville, already have specific communicable disease policies, which include AIDS.

THEY'RE SIMILAR in approach to the guidelines from the state Health Department and the CDC in Atlanta. These policies also include school staff members as well as students.

"The state guidelines don't tell you what steps to go through, or how much of a time line to take," said Dr. Herbert Baker, director of Guidance and Pupil Personnel Services for Birmingham schools. "Our policy fills in those gaps."

Other school districts, such as Livonia, Farmington, South Redford, Troy, Plymouth/Canton, Redford Union, are in the process of developing policies on AIDS and other communicable diseases. Most hope to have a policy by the end of the school year.

AIDS questions, answers

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The only way to stop the spread of AIDS is through prevention methods such as knowing your sexual partner, using condoms and not sharing drug needles.

That's the word from a state expert who says AIDS will increase dramatically in the next decade if educational efforts aren't increased.

"Our most potent tool is not high-technology success, but more education, communication, understanding and prevention," said Dr. June Osborn, dean of Public Health at the University of Michigan and longtime AIDS researcher.

Osborn was part of the panel on the joint study by the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine on AIDS.

Q. What is AIDS?

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome affects the body's immune system when HTLV-III/LAV, the antibodies of AIDS, infect the T lymphocytes. As a result, a person becomes susceptible to certain cancers and infections, mainly pneumonia (pneumocystis carinii).

Neurological damage also has been detected in those who have died from AIDS. The mortality rate from the disease is 100 percent.

For every case of AIDS reported, there are four more cases of AIDS Related Complex (ARC). ARC can range from something as mild as a fever to serious damage to the immune and nervous system.

People can also carry the AIDS antibodies and yet show no visible signs of the disease.

Q. How is AIDS transmitted?

The AIDS virus is transmitted by the exchange of body fluids, primarily blood and semen, which are infected with the AIDS antibodies.

Sexual contact (especially anal intercourse) and the sharing of contaminated needles provide the most favorable conditions for the transmission of the AIDS virus.

Sexual contact, according to a report by the American Council on Science and Health, is believed to be the risk factor in more than 60 percent of reported AIDS cases among adults.

Heterosexual transmission of

AIDS is possible but less likely, experts say. An infected male is more likely to pass on the virus to a female than an infected female would to a male.

Another less likely way to contract AIDS is by blood transfusion. All blood received by the American Red Cross is screened for the AIDS antibodies.

Q. How is AIDS not transmitted?

You cannot get the disease from casual contact with an AIDS carrier, such as shaking hands or sharing a drinking fountain.

Studies have been done on people who've taken care of AIDS patients, none of whom have contracted the virus.

And, according to the NAS/IOM report, there is no evidence the virus can be transmitted through kissing.

'Our most potent tool is not high-technology success, but more education, communication, understanding and prevention.'

— Dr. June Osborn

Q. How many people have AIDS?
As of Oct. 29, CDC had a reported 26,566 cases of AIDS in this country. For every person that has AIDS, there are four who have ARC.

The Coolfont study reports between 1 million and 1.5 million are infected with the AIDS' antibodies.

The rate of AIDS cases is doubling yearly with 273,000 people cumulatively expected to have been diagnosed as having the disease by 1991, 179,000 will already be dead by that point, experts predict.

Q. How many in Michigan?

There are 219 reported cases of AIDS in the state, two-thirds of which are in the southeast part of Michigan. The number is expected to increase proportionately with the national rate.

Q. Who gets AIDS?

Men account for 83 percent of the AIDS cases in the country.

Blacks and Hispanics represent 39 percent of the cases.

The majority of men who have AIDS are either homosexual or bisexual, though trends are changing.

Last year, 60 percent of the AIDS patients who were hospitalized in Manhattan were gay men. Sixty percent of the people hospitalized for AIDS this year in Manhattan are IV drug users, according to Osborn.

Blood transfusion recipients and hemophiliacs account for 3 to 4 percent of the cases. Approximately 304 children under the age of 13 have the disease.

Q. If I'm a heterosexual, non-drug user, how could I get AIDS?

If you don't participate in high-risk behaviors (male homosexuality with a multitude of partners, IV drug use), your chances diminish greatly. But it's very important to know your sexual partner and to take precautions, such as using condoms.

It is possible to be infected, though less likely, through heterosexual intercourse.

For example, it's estimated the number of male bisexuals in the country at least matches the number of homosexual men (estimated at 3 percent). But those who participate in occasional homosexual behavior don't consider themselves to be homosexual and thus not at a high risk to be carriers of the disease.

Infected mothers can pass the disease on to their unborn children.

Q. Can my child get AIDS from someone in school?

Not unless they're involved in the defined high-risk behaviors. Being in the same classroom with a person stricken with AIDS, experts say, doesn't put others at risk since the virus cannot be transmitted through casual contact.

Q. Am I at risk when I donate or receive blood?

No. The American Red Cross now screens all blood it receives for AIDS antibodies and those with high-risk behaviors are asked not to donate.

And the Red Cross, along with other blood centers, does not reuse needles.



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