

The National Mental Health Association Rejects Ex-Gays

By Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D.

In the alphabet soup that makes up the Washington, D.C. political lobbying scene, one of the more respected acronyms is NMHA. The National Mental Health Association has been around since 1950, and has been instrumental in advocating for the needs of the mentally ill.

As president of the American Mental Health Counselors Association several years ago, I was glad to work along side the NMHA on initiatives designed to improve access to mental-health care for all citizens.

Given the serious work that this organization does, I am shocked and disappointed to learn that the NMHA has determined to discriminate against an organization working to promote awareness of former homosexuals — the “Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays” (PFOX).

No Convention Booth Space for Ex-Gays

PFOX applied for booth space to exhibit at this summer’s NMHA convention and was turned down. The group was not rejected because of space limitations but because the NMHA does not like the PFOX view of sexual orientation change. That’s right; because PFOX believes some gays have changed to become straight, or as many former homosexuals refer to themselves, “ex-gay,” the NMHA rejected their application.

In a letter received May 17, Becky Roser, Marketing Manager with the NMHA, wrote, “NMHA feels that your organization’s principles diverge from our core mission.” After examining the PFOX website, Ms. Roser wrote, “having PFOX exhibit at our conference would indicate to participants that NMHA condones ‘reparative’ or ‘corrective’ therapy. As this is not the case, it would be disingenuous to have your organization participate in our Annual Conference...”

Ms. Roser enclosed the NMHA pamphlet, “What Does Gay Mean?” to present the NMHA “viewpoint on gay and lesbian issues.”

I wonder how many of the 340 local NMHA affiliates know that there is an official “viewpoint on gay and lesbian issues?”

What is the core mission of NMHA? According to the NMHA website, NMHA “is dedicated to promoting mental health, preventing mental disorders, and achieving victory over mental illness through advocacy, education, research and service.” Knowing both organizations, I cannot see how PFOX diverges from the mission of NMHA. In fact, judging from the publication “What Does Gay Mean?” the NMHA could use some assistance from groups like PFOX to better address its mission

with the subset of people who have gone from gay to straight.

Finding of the Spitzer Study: Lessened Depression

For instance, the NMHA booklet makes a sweeping but undocumented claim: “...attempts to ‘cure’ lesbians and gay men may help change sexual behavior temporarily but will also create emotional trauma.” If the NMHA were true to their mission, they would read psychiatrist Robert Spitzer’s study of ex-gays carefully. In his work, published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* in October, 2003, Dr. Spitzer found that before entering counseling, over 40% of his former homosexual research participants were markedly to extremely depressed. After they had reoriented their sexual preferences, 1% of men and 4% of women were depressed at this level. This is a striking change.

Clinical Depression Lessened by Reorientation Therapy

Clearly, seeking the counseling rejected by the NMHA helped Dr. Spitzer’s participants alleviate a condition about which the NMHA is supposed to care a great deal — clinical depression.

Some might protest: “The NMHA is a private group. They can do what they want.” I suppose the jury is out on that issue, in that PFOX has not decided whether to file a discrimination complaint. However, over the past several years, the NMHA has received substantial funding from the federal government. Is it proper for the Center for Mental Health Services and the Departments of Justice, Education and Health and Human Services to give millions to the NMHA, and then for the NMHA to discriminate based on sexual-orientation perspective?

The question remains: Why does the NMHA want to stay in the dark about ex-gays?

Apparently, the NMHA would like to pretend that ex-gays don’t exist. Given NMHA’s roots in successfully battling the stigma of mental illness, it seems a sad and illogical twist for this great organization to reject a group of people without even meeting them. ■

Dr. Throckmorton is the producer of the Truth Comes Out, a spoken word CD geared to young adults concerning sexual orientation. His columns have been published in over 40 newspapers and numerous websites such as Worldnetdaily.com, Christianpost.com, Townhall.com, Michnews.com and Americandaily.com.