

American Academy Of Family Physicians Publishes Health Screening Guidelines For Gay Patients

Broad Spectrum of Health Issues Identified

by Frank York

The American Family Physician, the official journal of the American Academy of Family Physicians, published health screening guidelines for gay patients in its May, 2004 issue.

Dr. Daniel Knight, (University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences) authored the report. In it, he notes that "Recent trends indicate a resurgence in risky behaviors that expose men who have sex with men to HIV infection and other STDs. The reported prevalence of men engaging in un-protected anal intercourse increased from 37% in 1993-94 to 50% in 1996-1997."

Unsafe Sex a Common Problem

Dr. Knight also warns: "There is evidence that many men are engaging in dangerous sexual practices that may jeopardize their health. These sexual practices include anal sex without a condom ('barebacking'), oral sex without a condom, oral stimulation of the anus ('rimming') without protection, multiple sex partners at one time, and the use of illicit drugs."

The report states that "Men who have sex with men are at significant risk of contracting HIV infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), as well as gonorrhea, syphilis, and herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2) infection."

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Dr. Knight urges family physicians to conduct sexual, behavioral, and psychological risk assessments with homosexual patients and to do so in a nonjudgmental way.

A Higher Level of Mental Health Problems

He notes that "homosexuality has been associated with higher rates of psychologic and behavioral disorders, including depression, anxiety, mood disorders, suicidal thoughts and plans, eating disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, and cigarette smoking." However, he blames the "stigmatization of homosexuality in American society" as a causative factor in the development of these various disorders.

In his conclusion, Dr. Knight suggests that "specific data should be collected on the prevalence of anal neoplasia in men with a history of receptive anal sex, with special emphasis on HIV-infected men with HPV infection."

The American Cancer Society has an online book, *Cancer Medicine*, which includes a chapter titled, "Neoplasm of the Anus." This chapter deals specifically with the rising levels of anal cancer among homosexual males and notes that gay men are now getting this cancer at a younger age from the regular practice of anal intercourse. ■