

The global AIDS epidemic

BY ALAN LEBLANC

I guess by now people think we are beating a dead horse with this AIDS crisis. At the risk of sounding out of date, I have to call this notion to your attention. The rate of HIV infection may be slowing in the industrialized world due to early testing and access to condoms, but in the less developed world, supplies — such as medication and prophylactics — are out of the average person's reach.

The numbers in the latest issue of *Time* magazine are astounding. Many HIV cases are systemic of prostitution in major urban centres. Fifty per cent of all prostitutes in Bombay have HIV and the numbers have jumped thirtyfold in Malaysia in three years. Note to all you travelling businessmen: keep it in your pants if you value your life.

The largest proportion of HIV cases exist in the sub-Saharan region of Africa, where almost six per cent of all inhabitants have HIV. While that may seem insignificant, bear in mind that this virus tends to spread in an exponential fashion, and the cases could double within five years.

Contrary to popular belief, intravenous drug use is on the rise, and sharing needles has been the number one cause of the spread of AIDS in the Middle East, East Asia, North Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe. Wouldn't you expect an AIDS-educated society to know that that practice was dangerous? Take away the education and you have your answer.

Some might think AIDS is a problem unique to today's generation of adults, but we forget that many of these adults are giving birth to tiny babies. These babies usually don't live to see their twelfth birthday, and so we may see a decrease in population growth. In fact, it is estimated that the overall global natality/mortality rate will be negative. In other words, more people will be dying

than will be born, and the global population will drop.

It was suggested to me that negative population growth isn't such a bad thing. After all, we eventually had to get the population under control here on grand old Spaceship Earth, and maybe nature was just taking its course. It was an unfortunate way of looking at it, because I always figured that quality and quantity of life were coexistent.

If a substantial population of a certain continent were dying due to AIDS, could it lead to a war for certain drugs? We already saw the beginning of a resource war being fought this decade, the real "War on Drugs" may soon be on its way.

You may be aware of the new protease inhibitors being offered on the market. In the earliest stages of HIV, within a few months of infection, treatment can completely eradicate the virus in a few years. Mind you, this has only been successful in some instances, and treatment can cost upwards of twenty thousand dollars US. Simply supplying these drugs to the developing world would be extremely costly, and may only mitigate the problem until a stronger strain of the dis-

ease takes hold.

Besides, have we learned nothing from dealing with past diseases? Whooping cough and influenza have made a comeback in certain areas of the world after antibiotics failed to wipe them out. Could we possibly be able to create a strain of "Super-AIDS?" What if it mutates to a waterborne or airborne variety? The consequences could be apocalyptic.

Keeping in tune with the traditions of an opinion column, here is my synopsis: we're in big trouble. The one thing we can do about this looming disaster is to set an example in the developed world. Premarital sex in the past was considered immoral; today it is considered suicide. The prospects of using intravenous drugs has always been idiocy, but now AIDS and the drug seem to be in a death race to see which can kill you first. (The Amsterdamites are now reconsidering decriminalizing heroin use. Aren't they clever?)

So that's it, I've exhausted all my bright Earth-saving ideas. If you, the faithful reader, have any, you know where to write your letters.

My Head Hurts

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

Last week I had the flu. My nose was sloppy and wet and my throat was cracked and dry. Every bone in my body ached, so I moved as little as possible. I was sweating and shivering simultaneously and I had a violent cough that continually threw me to the ground. Worst of all, my head inflated to twice its normal size.

Normally such an inflated head would be an amusing ab-

normality, but on this occasion it was very tender. The increase in size made it (my head) very difficult to maneuver and everything in my apartment seemed to be on a collision course with my mushy brain — the repeated blows became almost unbearable.

I tried to leave my apartment but it wasn't easy. Along with my battered and diminished immune system, my tolerance of fellow human beings was also suffering. With my giant, tender head

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Help the Gazette celebrate Pink Triangle Day – Friday, February 14th.

The Gazette is looking for the voices of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community through commentary, poetry, articles, photos and graphics.

All submissions are for the February 13th issue of the Gazette, which will contain a special supplement recognizing LGBTQ issues.

Call 494-2507 to get involved or drop by the Gazette offices in Room 312 of the Dalhousie Student Union Building.

The deadline for submissions for the supplement is Monday, February 10th.

