

AIDS establishment to address needs of HIV+ women?

Canadian University Press

OTTAWA — The American Centre for Disease Control's definition of AIDS is about to be expanded to include symptoms particular to women, according to a draft of the revised definition.

There have been no changes to the CDC's definition of AIDS since 1987, and AIDS activists have been lobbying for the inclusion of women's symptoms. A new definition is scheduled for release later this month.

"I'm very happy," said Linda Rowe, a Vancouver AIDS activist. "I'm HIV-positive, so I've been pushing for (the expansion of the definition) since Oct. 1989."

The definition, used to determine eligibility for family benefits and

welfare in Canada, has excluded symptoms specific to women but recognized by AIDS activists and counsellors. HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, is thought to cause AIDS.

While Kaposi's sarcoma and pneumocystis carinii pneumonia are common to gay men, women rarely display these symptoms. Women more often exhibit upper respiratory infections, chronic, persistent yeast infection, human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer.

Symptoms outlined in the new definition include thrush, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), cervical cancer and chronic yeast infections which do not respond to treatment.

Darien Taylor, co-founder of the Toronto-based group, Voices of

Positive Women, said the failure to recognize these symptoms often leads doctors to misdiagnose, or simply dismiss women's health concerns.

"If you're a woman and have a constellation of symptoms that would indicate to activists that you're HIV-positive, it may often go unrecognized by doctors until it's too late," she said.

Miranda LaFaye (not her real name) said she became ill six years ago. Her doctor treated her for asthma and a throat infection, ignoring her other symptoms. She was not tested for HIV. It wasn't until 1987, after discovering her partner was HIV-positive that she was tested. The result was positive.

When she went to a Toronto hospital for treatment, LaFaye was given

a questionnaire asking her if she engaged in fisting, how often she had anal intercourse and if her partner ejaculated inside her.

"I couldn't believe it," she said. "It was asking me questions completely foreign to my experience. I just stared at the page and I started to cry."

Women are not only misdiagnosed or diagnosed late in their illness, they are also underdiagnosed. Since women's symptoms are not the 1987 CDC definition, they die with AIDS-related complex (ARC), which is viewed as a point between asymptomatic illness and AIDS.

While the average life expectancy following an AIDS diagnosis for women is 15.5 weeks, it is 21 months for a white, gay man, according to a 1989 paper presented to the Fifth International Conference on AIDS.

This is attributable to misdiagnosis and the fact the women imply aren't being tested for HIV at the same rate men are, Taylor said.

Another problem facing women with HIV and AIDS is the lack of

clinical trials which test new drugs. In Canada, 40 trials are underway, but none of them are specifically directed at women.

Rowe said she wants to see some action.

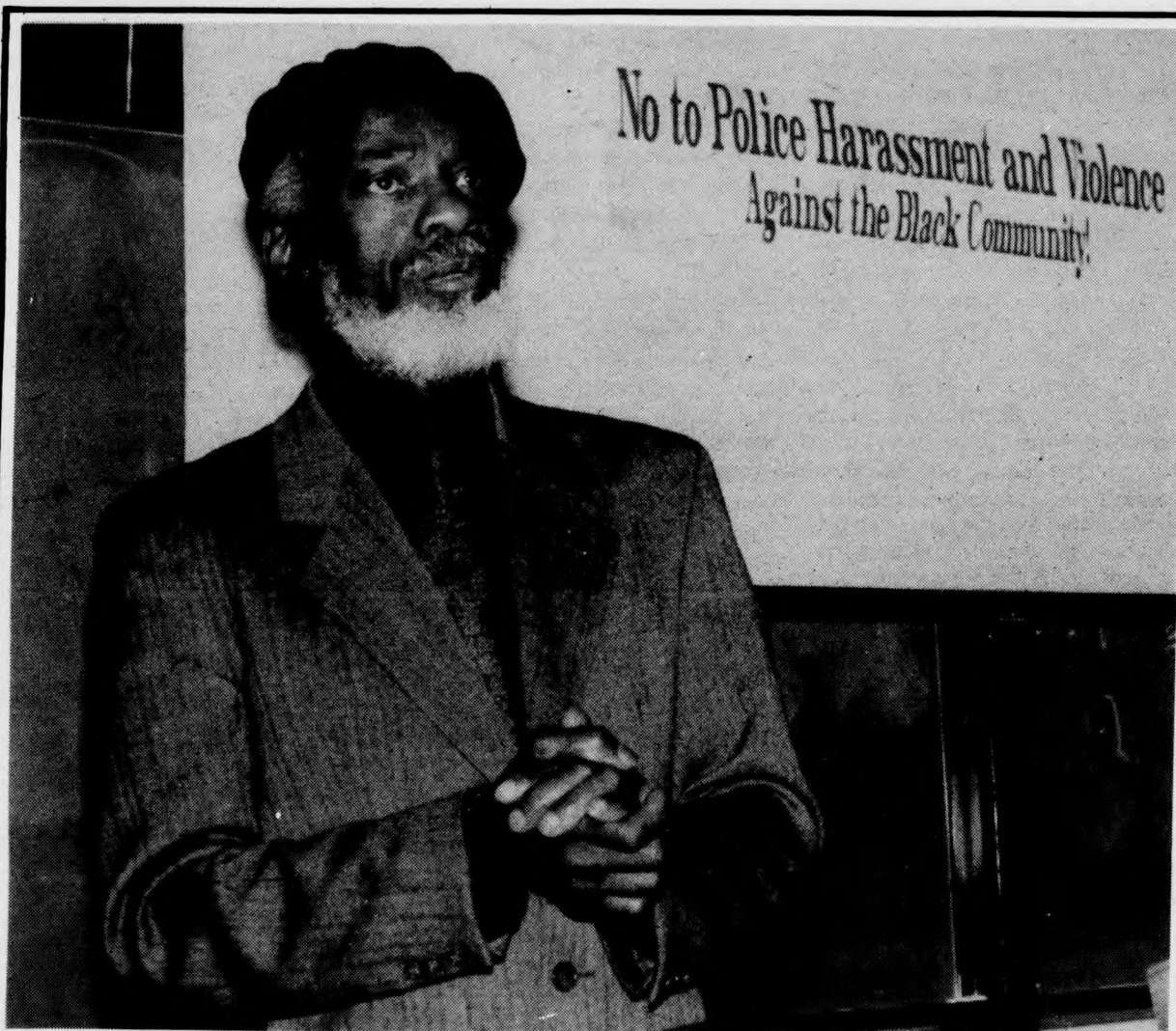
"I'm hoping to see clinical trials looking at yeast infection, PID and cervical cancer," Rowe said. "There are none specific to us (and) we need to know things."

"Is PID more prevalent in women with HIV? If so, should we be testing for HIV" when a woman is diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease, she said.

But according to Robyn Sussel of the Canadian HIV Trials Network, it is difficult to set up trials geared to women because there are so few who have been diagnosed with AIDS.

"Logistically it's a nightmare and there's too few (women) to make it statistically relevant," Sussel said.

According to Oct. 1991 statistics from the federal Department of Health and Welfare, 179 women and 2,972 men have died of AIDS since 1979 in Canada.



Dudley Laws speaks at York

Last Thursday, a forum was held on the subject of police harassment of the Black community. Speakers included Dudley Laws and Dari Meade of the Black Action Defence Coalition, and Judge Stanley Grizell. The theme of the event was summarized when Meade quoted Franz Fanon in saying: 'Each generation will either fulfill its destiny or betray it.' Photo by David Sutherland.

Concordia scourges sexist degree terms

Canadian University Press

MONTREAL — Concordia University graduates will soon be able to choose a degree with a gender-neutral title, but several university senators say the move doesn't go far enough to combat sexism.

Following a 21-1-5 senate vote Feb. 7, students may now opt for a Baccalaureate rather than a Bachelor's degree, or a Magisteriate instead of a Master's degree. The degrees will still be referred to as B.A.s and M.A.s.

Although most senate members support the change — which will be reviewed in five years — several said it isn't sweeping enough.

Sociology professor John Drysdale said the university should lead the way in the elimination of sexist and gender-exclusive terms.

"If we're really convinced that one set of terms is sexist, then it's up to us to change the terms, not to merely give students a choice between a sexist set of terms and a non-sexist set of terms," he said.

It is not clear which type of degree the university will grant if a student does not indicate a choice.

The policy will come into effect in 1993, and alumni may request a degree with the new title once it kicks in.

Last year, Concordia rejected Carolyn Gammon's requested for a Mistress of Arts.

Ken Huck, a student who requested a baccalaureate for his spring graduation, said he thinks the policy is "watered-down."

"Having an option is good, but the default position should definitely be that you get a gender-neutral degree," he said.

Gerald Auchinachie, English department chair, opposed the policy. He said he didn't find the degree titles sexist.

"I've seen so many women with Bachelor's degrees that I don't associate it with gender-exclusiveness," he said. "As well, I don't believe objective reality is driven by words. I'm not sure this is going to change much."

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