

CHECKup

Important news from the nation's leading health care facility serving the LGBT communities.

Volume XVI, Number 1 • Spring 2004

Focus on: Men's Health

Sex is a natural and normal part of life. Yet lack of information, discrimination, fear, internalized shame, and denial cause many people to make ill-informed decisions regarding when and how they engage in sex.

As a major provider of health care for the LGBT community in New York City, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the growing cause for concern within the community especially among gay and bi men.

Last year, the rate of HIV infection increased among gay and bi men — and the number of syphilis cases has increased by 400% in the last two years. Alcohol or party drugs before or during sex and a complacent attitude about HIV are likely causes for these marked increases.

To counter these trends, we at Callen-Lorde are making a concerted effort to help people understand the causes and symptoms of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI). We believe that knowledge is key — that the more people know, the happier and healthier they will be.

Always non-judgmental, we're about empowering people to make the right decisions regarding their lives. Callen-Lorde medical staff and counselors help equip our patients with tools to prevent the spread of diseases and recognize symptoms. And if a disease is diagnosed, we can provide treatment regardless of ability to pay.

A number of our programs help to foster and protect the sexual health of men in our community:

Sexual Health Clinic

Our counselors and medical providers are trained to address all questions and concerns regarding sexual health in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

Callen-Lorde's Sexual Health Clinic provides screening, counseling

and treatment for syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, parasites, hepatitis, herpes, crabs, scabies and genital warts (HPV). And the HIV rapid test is also available upon request.

For men who are sexually active,



but do not have the symptoms of an STI, it is still important to be screened at least annually because symptoms can go unnoticed.

HIV Testing and Counseling

Callen-Lorde's staff is highly trained and sensitive. They understand that it isn't always easy to practice safe sex in every situation, every time.

So if a patient is unsure of his HIV status — but wants to find out — we help prepare him for the test and support him regardless of the result.

Sexual Health Counseling

Callen-Lorde offers free confidential counseling services for men who are having problems in their sex life or relationships. The goal of this short-term counseling is to help men develop skills and strengths in pursuing a fulfilling and healthy sex life.

Hepatitis A & B Vaccinations

Sexually active men who have sex with other men are at increased risk for both hepatitis A & B. Hepatitis A & B

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From the Executive Director



Dear Friend,

I am pleased to send you this issue of our Spring 2004 Newsletter. We have a lot of newsworthy stories to report.

Our cover story focuses on Callen-Lorde's programs that address the sexual health of the men in our community — while our Medical Director discusses the role of antibiotics and increased breast cancer risk on page 2.

There is some disturbing news we feel compelled to report. The use of crystal methamphetamine among gay and bi-sexual men has reached epidemic proportions. We were a sponsor of a forum on the subject and are designing interventions to combat this potentially deadly addictive threat to our community's health. Read more on page 3.

On page 4, you'll read a heart-warming story from Donna — one of our patients of transgender experience. Donna praises Callen-Lorde for not only addressing her physical health — but the health of her entire outlook, including self-acceptance.

The great news is that our big fundraising event in the fall raised more funds than all prior events. Read more about this and plan to attend our fun Spring Event at the Central Park Zoo on June 15th.

In closing, I want to thank everyone — our staff, volunteers and donors — for the loyal support that enables Callen-Lorde to reach out to everyone in our community.

Jay Laudato

Sincerely,
Jay Laudato
Executive Director



Current Health Issues highlights newsworthy topics in health care that may affect your well-being as well as that of your partner and your family. For more information, each section is followed by Internet links and/or references.

Antibiotics and Breast Cancer Risk — Is there meaning in this?

A recent study looked at antibiotic use among 2,266 women diagnosed with breast cancer, compared to use among 7,953 women without cancer enrolled in the same healthcare plan. The study concluded that antibiotic use among women with breast cancer was more common than among women without.

In support of the study's findings, there are various biological explanations that could account for this association. For instance, antibiotic use may be a marker for chronic inflammation, which has been linked to a substantial proportion of cancers worldwide.

However, other characteristics in the test group might have contributed to those women who were at higher risk. They were older, had started their menses at younger ages, were more overweight, were more likely to have a family history of breast cancer and were more likely to have taken post-menopausal hormones. Any or all of these factors could explain their increased breast cancer. As is often true for reports of new associations, this study provides many more questions than answers, and further studies are needed.

JAMA. 2004; 291:827-835; 880-881.

Drug Resistant Staph Infections Identified in Gay and Bisexual Men

Recent reports indicate a nationwide increase in methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) skin infections among bisexual and gay men. While not specific to men who have sex with men, MRSA is causing serious health effects for those infected.

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is a bacterium commonly carried on the skin, in the rectum, or in the nose of healthy people without causing any problems. It can cause minor infections, like pimples and boils. Occasionally it can cause more serious infections, like pneumonia. While most infections are easily treated with antibiotics, the MRSA bacteria have become resistant to commonly used penicillin-related antibiotics.

MRSA is almost always spread by direct physical contact, and not through the air. It may also spread through indirect contact — touching objects (e.g., towels, sheets, wound dressings, clothes, benches, sports equipment) contaminated by the infected skin of a person with MRSA or staph bacteria. The best way to prevent staph or MRSA infection is to practice good hygiene.

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/mrsafaq.htm

Internet Pharmacies

Online pharmacies are attracting a growing number of patients and offer many potential benefits. First, online dispensers provide increased accessibility, since orders can be placed 24 hours a day and medication delivered by mail.

Second, they can promote enhanced communication and adherence, since the cloak of anonymity may encourage patients to ask questions that they would be too embarrassed to ask in person. And Internet pharmacies generally provide more comprehensive drug information, can send automated refill reminders, and offer cheaper prices.

Still, major concerns exist. Various studies show that as many as 20% of Internet pharmacies do not require a prescription or physician consultation before dispensing medication, which is

a violation of federal law and may expose patients to “drug-drug” and “drug-disease” interactions as well as dangerous adverse effects. But many health care professionals and agencies question the safety of online consultations and the quality of care that “cyberdoctors” are capable of delivering. One of the largest worries is that many Internet sites offer medications imported from other countries, where products are not regulated by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and may be expired, sub-potent, contaminated or counterfeit.

To address some of these concerns, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy formed the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) program in 1999 in response to consumers' and regulators' complaints. VIPPS-certified pharmacies post a digital seal of approval on their home page that notifies consumers that the company has passed an on-site inspection and criteria review. When choosing an online pharmacy, consumers are encouraged to look for this seal of approval.

Mayo Clinic Proceedings 2004;79:188-194.

Sincerely,

Dawn Harbatkin, MD
Medical Director

Focus on: Men's Health

Continued from cover

are serious liver diseases that are transmitted in ways similar to HIV transmission. Fortunately safe and effective vaccinations are available. A Callen-Lorde medical provider can help patients determine which of these vaccines is best for them.

Our Right

It is within our grasp to remain healthy. As members of a concerned, caring community, it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves and others. We have the right to be healthy.

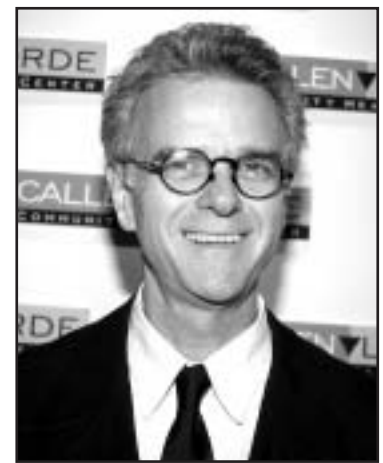
Awards Dinner Generates Record Response

More than 350 guests attended the Third Annual Community Health Awards to show their support of Callen-Lorde at the elegant Tribeca Rooftop on November 18, 2003.

The distinguished honorees included The Greater New York City Affiliate of The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, United States Congressman Jerrold Nadler, and James F. Braun, D.O., Founding President of Physicians Research Network.

Serving as Event Co-Chairs were Claudia Slacik and Jonathan Ladd, the incoming Co-Chairs of the Callen-Lorde Board of Directors, who recruited a large benefit committee that raised over \$115,000, a 40% increase over the previous year.

As the celebration concluded, outgoing Board Co-Chairs Ellen Alpert and Antonio Poglianich took the podium. Ellen, who had chosen Callen-Lorde as her own healthcare provider, concluded with a special request: "Give as generously as you can in support of the life-saving work that



(Clockwise from top left)

Outgoing Board Co-Chairs, Ellen Alpert and Antonio Poglianich.

Founding President of Physicians Research Network James F. Braun.

Incoming Board Co-Chair, Claudia Slacik and Co-President and Executive Director of the Greater New York City Affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Cathy Leather and Nicole Rubin.

goes on at Callen-Lorde. You'll ensure that every person who walks through the door receives the health care they need and deserve."

Jay Laudato, Callen-Lorde's

Executive Director, commended both Ellen and Antonio for their outstanding contributions and for helping to expand Callen-Lorde's outreach to everyone in our community.

Confronting the Crystal Epidemic

The use of crystal methamphetamine — commonly known as crystal — has increased at an alarming rate among many gay and bisexual men in New York City. Widely used in dance, sex clubs and sex parties, this and other "party drugs" pose serious health risks.

A highly addictive stimulant, crystal gives a heightened sense of euphoria, self-esteem, libido (sex drive) and energy. It not only increases the libido but can lead to sexual compulsiveness. Men on crystal greatly desire sex, cannot stop having it, and often combine the drug with Viagra to enable them to continue to have sex for longer periods.

Stories of uncontrollable crystal use in which gay men lose relationships, jobs and apartments are now becoming tragically more and more common.

One of the gravest results of crystal use is the increase in high-risk sexual behavior, especially unprotected anal sex. At a recent community forum called The Crystal Meth—HIV Connection, a discussion was held on the connection between crystal use and unprotected anal sex.

The forum, which drew over 600 community members, was organized by Dr. Bruce Kellerhouse and Daniel Carlson and hosted by Harvey Fierstein. Other panelists included Dr. Steven Lee, a psychiatrist specializing in addiction who spoke about his experience at Callen-Lorde working with men who are unable to stop using the substance.

Despite the critical nature of this problem, very little information and even fewer treatment options currently exist.

To address the issue, Callen-Lorde has now entered into a collaboration with the New York Academy of Medicine to evaluate two interventions to treat crystal use among gay and bisexual men.

The first is the use of psychotropic medication to combat the psychological side effects that result from stopping use of the drug, including panic attacks, depression and sleeplessness. Callen-Lorde's psychiatrists will prescribe short doses of these medications and will continue to meet with patients to ease the effects of withdrawal. The second effort will develop a counseling model to assist gay and bisexual men in gaining skills and strength to resist further use of the substance.

These services will be available in the summer of 2004.

Our Mission

The Michael Callen-Audre Lorde Community Health Center provides quality health care and related services to New York's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community regardless of ability to pay. To further this mission, Callen-Lorde promotes health education and wellness and advocates for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender health issues.

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Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
356 W. 18th Street • 212-271-7200

Save a Tree!

Receive CheckUp and other news about Callen-Lorde in your e-mail! Send your e-mail address to CHECKup@callen-lorde.org. We will never share your email address and you can unsubscribe by emailing us at any time. Visit us online:

www.callen-lorde.org

A Grateful Patient

In December, we received a generous gift accompanied by a very touching note from Donna — one of our patients of transgender experience. Her words are truly inspiring:

"It's very difficult for me to express how much Callen-Lorde means to me. I went two and a half years without any medical care at all — for fear of being "found out." Now I am being treated like a normal human being, deserving of medical care like anyone else, and accepted as a transgendered woman.

My positive experience at Callen-

Lorde has been instrumental in my transition, in my process of self-acceptance, and in my coming out in the world as myself. So, I want to thank you, not just for helping me — but for the wonderful job you do for transgendered people and the rest of the LGBT community."

At Callen-Lorde we know that many in our community avoid health care for fear of being discriminated against. We take deep pride in knowing that regardless of gender, identity, or age, Callen-Lorde treats people — like people.

New Benefits for Patients

MDhub is a free, simple, and highly functional Website that provides multiple benefits for Callen-Lorde patients. It offers an alternative to the telephone for patients to contact Callen-Lorde for their non-urgent requests for prescription renewals, appointments, referrals, and other services. For patients who may not have the time during the day or who need privacy, MDHub allows them to request services they need at any time of the day.

Patients can access MDhub either through Callen-Lorde's website (www.callen-lorde.org) or directly through the MDhub website (www.mdhub.com).

At the MDhub website, add Callen-Lorde's main telephone number (212-271-7200) and access is given to our specific site. From the Callen-Lorde page a patient will submit a simple online form indicating which services they are requesting (appointment, referral, etc). Within minutes, MDhub will fax Callen-Lorde the patient requests.

MDhub also benefits Callen-Lorde. The information provided is more accurate, and it eliminates the need to make more callbacks. With non-urgent matters taken care of over the Internet we will be able to spend more time with patients who have specific or urgent concerns.

Callen-Lorde Comes to Fire Island

For the past 15 years Pines Care Center (PCC) volunteer physicians have treated everything from allergies and sunburns to emergencies like broken bones and heart attacks. Now Callen-Lorde has joined forces with the PCC to provide quality medical services during the summer months.

Residents can enjoy their vacations and weekends knowing that the same ter-

rific volunteers, along with Callen-Lorde medical staff, will be available to help. The Pines Care Center facility is located in the Community Center on Coast Guard Walk and will be open every day this summer from noon to 2:00 p.m. For emergencies, a staff member will be on call 24 hours. For more information or to volunteer call Joe Narus at 212-271-7200, ext. 610.



Save The Date! Walk on the Wild Side 4

Tuesday, June 15th, 6–9pm

A Summer Party for Donors
to Callen-Lorde Community Health
Center at the Central Park Zoo

Polar bears, sea lions, penguins.
Callen-Lorde hosts one of the most fun events in New York City. Be sure to mark you calendar — and children are welcome. Check our website for further updates.
www.callen-lorde.org