

The Odyssey of a Brochure on AIDS

Will CDC ever get to mail its AIDS pamphlet to every household in America? The President's panel chickens out; 38 congressmen plan to mail Surgeon General's report instead

To start its national AIDS education campaign this October, the federal government had hoped to mail an information brochure called "America Responds to AIDS" to every household in the land. Alas, America will not get a chance to respond because the brochure has become hopelessly bogged down by bureaucratic intransigence and political meddling.

In its first meeting on 9 September, the President's new commission on the AIDS epidemic postponed making a decision on whether or not to mail the brochure. "We just felt like we weren't ready to tackle the mailing yet," says W. Eugene Mayberry, chairman of the commission and chief executive officer of the Mayo Foundation in Rochester, Minnesota. Asked whether the commission would have done battle over the brochure, Frank Lilly, the only known homosexual on the panel and chairman of the genetics department at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, replied: "Are you kidding? They would have freaked out." The commission has been roundly criticized for its general lack of knowledge on AIDS, its conservative make-up, and the extreme views held by some of its members who at various times have called for widespread mandatory testing and quarantines.

Hearing this, one might guess that the leaflet contains steamy language and graphic illustrations of safer sex techniques. After all, the eight-page pamphlet has received unusually close attention from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which is responsible for the education campaign, as well as the Public Health Service, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the White House's Office of Management and Budget, several working groups within the President's Domestic Policy Council, and, most recently, the President's commission on AIDS, which is charged with approving the brochure.

The pamphlet itself is quite tame. It was produced by Ogilvy and Mather, the large public relations concern which was hired by CDC for \$4.5 million, and it is one of the marvels of advertising that the deadly

scourge of AIDS could be wrapped in so wholesome and moral a package. Its theme, "America Responds to AIDS," is a slogan chosen to "prompt feelings of pride, patriotism, and reflect the American mosaic," according to a CDC memorandum. Says Gary Noble, AIDS coordinator in the Public Health Service: "The idea was to bring people on board without turning them off."

In a draft copy of the brochure obtained by *Science*, parents are told to talk to their children about AIDS and "encourage them to share your family's moral and religious values." Parents are also advised to be true to their partners. Young persons are instructed to "discuss and understand and live by your family's values." In step with Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign, teenagers

One might guess (wrongly) that the brochure contains steamy language and graphic illustrations.

are advised to say no to drugs. And no to sex. Sexually active people are instructed to enter into "a mutually faithful, single-partner relationship with an uninfected person, or at least be sure to reduce your risk by using a condom." Proponents of safer sex techniques should count it a victory that the word "condom" is used three times in the pamphlet, even though it loses in the final tally to the phrase "mutually faithful, single-partner relationship." The words "family" or "families" appear 12 times. The word "homosexual" does not put in an appearance, even though homosexuals comprise 70% of all AIDS cases.

Like any good piece of advertising, the brochure is not burdened by too many details. Compared to Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's 36-page pamphlet on AIDS, the CDC's mailer is a light read indeed. No T lymphocytes. No *Pneumocystis carinii*

pneumonia. And unlike the Surgeon General's report, which addresses in some depth risky types of sexual behavior, including a discussion of anal intercourse (complete with a detailed drawing of the vulnerable lining of the rectum), CDC's brochure only mentions that "having sex with an infected person" is one of three main ways the AIDS virus is spread.

As it stands now, the brochure will not be mailed in October. "Sure we're disappointed," says James Mason, director of CDC. "There was a tight window in the beginning of August when we could have gotten the brochure out. . . . That window has come and gone." Cynical staffers working on Capitol Hill say the present imbroglio is exactly what the White House wanted. Says one staff member, "They gave it to the Mayberry commission knowing they would punt. It's just a tactic, just another way to keep from having to deal with AIDS."

Gary Bauer, assistant to the president for policy development, says the White House is not sure that a widely distributed brochure is the most effective way to educate people. "What exactly is it that people don't know?" asks Bauer. "Is there a breathing American who doesn't know that you get AIDS from sex or a dirty needle? If there is, he probably is not the kind of person who reads his mail."

Whether the brochure will be used in any fashion during the education campaign depends on whether it successfully navigates the lengthy approval process within the Department of Health and Human Services. Paula Van Ness, director of CDC's AIDS information and education campaign, thinks it eventually will. Instead of using the brochure as a mass mailer, Van Ness says CDC might distribute the leaflet through supermarkets, drugstores, and organizations like the YMCA. But that is a far cry from slipping the brochure into every mailbox in America.

Frustrated with CDC's failure to distribute information about AIDS, 38 members of Congress have requested approximately 7 million copies of Koop's report on AIDS which they plan to mail to their constituents using their free franking privileges.

CDC's failure to do the national mailing is certain to raise the hackles of some members of Congress. In its supplemental appropriations bill for fiscal year 1987, Congress gave CDC an additional \$20 million for AIDS education. The language in the bill's accompanying report is quite clear: additional funds were given "to finance a mass mailing of information about AIDS to every household in the nation." Says Van Ness: "There will be some explaining to do." ■

WILLIAM BOOTH