

## Forum Focuses on Hope in the Face of AIDS

By BUNNY ADAMS & GABRIELLE WISE

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“AIDS is not going to remain collected in pockets of people you don’t know,” said Dr. Iris Davis, keynote speaker at an SGI-USA-sponsored HIV/AIDS prevention and education forum today. Dr. Davis, a professor of medicine at the University of Maryland, dramatically illustrated her point by asking each 12th person in the audience to stand — on the average, one in 12 people in New York has AIDS or HIV.

With the theme “Embracing Hope and Possibilities,” the day-long forum at the New York Culture Center enlightened members and their friends to the fact that this devastating disease must be faced with courage and hope. Dr. Davis encouraged each participant to be a warrior in his or her daily life when it comes to this disease. “HIV will not change,” she said, “until we change.” She believes that counseling and therapy can improve survival rates.

Jose Claudio of the New York University Medical Center gave a general overview of the disease, detailing exactly how HIV attacks the body’s immune system. In spite of the preponderance of information on risk behavior, there are still believed to be 6,000 new HIV infections each day, he said. The World Health Organization estimates that by the year 2000, 30 to 40 million people will be infected globally.

Mr. Claudio explained ways to lessen the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, such as learning how to negotiate safer practices with one’s sexual partners. “Of course, abstinence is 100 percent effective,” he added.

The forum sponsored 10 afternoon workshops in which members and guests could speak or just listen and take notes. Among the topics of discussion were the emotional aspects of dealing with AIDS, ethical issues, socio-economic issues and nutrition.

Donna Tinnerello, an AIDS nutritionist who led a nutrition workshop, said that since AIDS is a catabolic disease — the body is continuously breaking down — the patient needs to eat larger quantities of food than the average person for the body to repair itself. Fruits and vegetables, because of their antioxidants and phytochemicals, are imperative, she said. Exercise is also crucial because lean muscle mass builds the immune system and vastly increases the T-cell count. “Aerobic exercise is the best for immunity, and patients must do 45 minutes three times a week,” she advised. Of equal import is food safety, since those with weakened immune systems are vulnerable to parasitic and bacterial infections.

Francia Castro, an organizer of the forum, said that like Buddhism, the forum aimed to create value in the face of the obstacles of AIDS. For example, SGI-USA member Doug Lambe, who has been infected for 14 years, described contracting HIV as “the best thing that ever happened to me.” It forced him to do some soul searching and put an end to a chain of love relations that had gone nowhere. He described himself as a long-term progresser — he, like about 1 percent of those infected, is likely to never get full-blown AIDS.

Reactions to the forum were positive. Barbara Walters, who counsels people before and after HIV testing, said that “the dialogue with Dr. Davis was very empowering. It has encouraged me to upgrade my counseling certification to include more training on a humanistic level.”

Clare Chapman concurred: “It answered a lot of questions for me. I’m determined to keep in touch with what’s going on with the disease rather than thinking it’s going to go away by itself.”

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