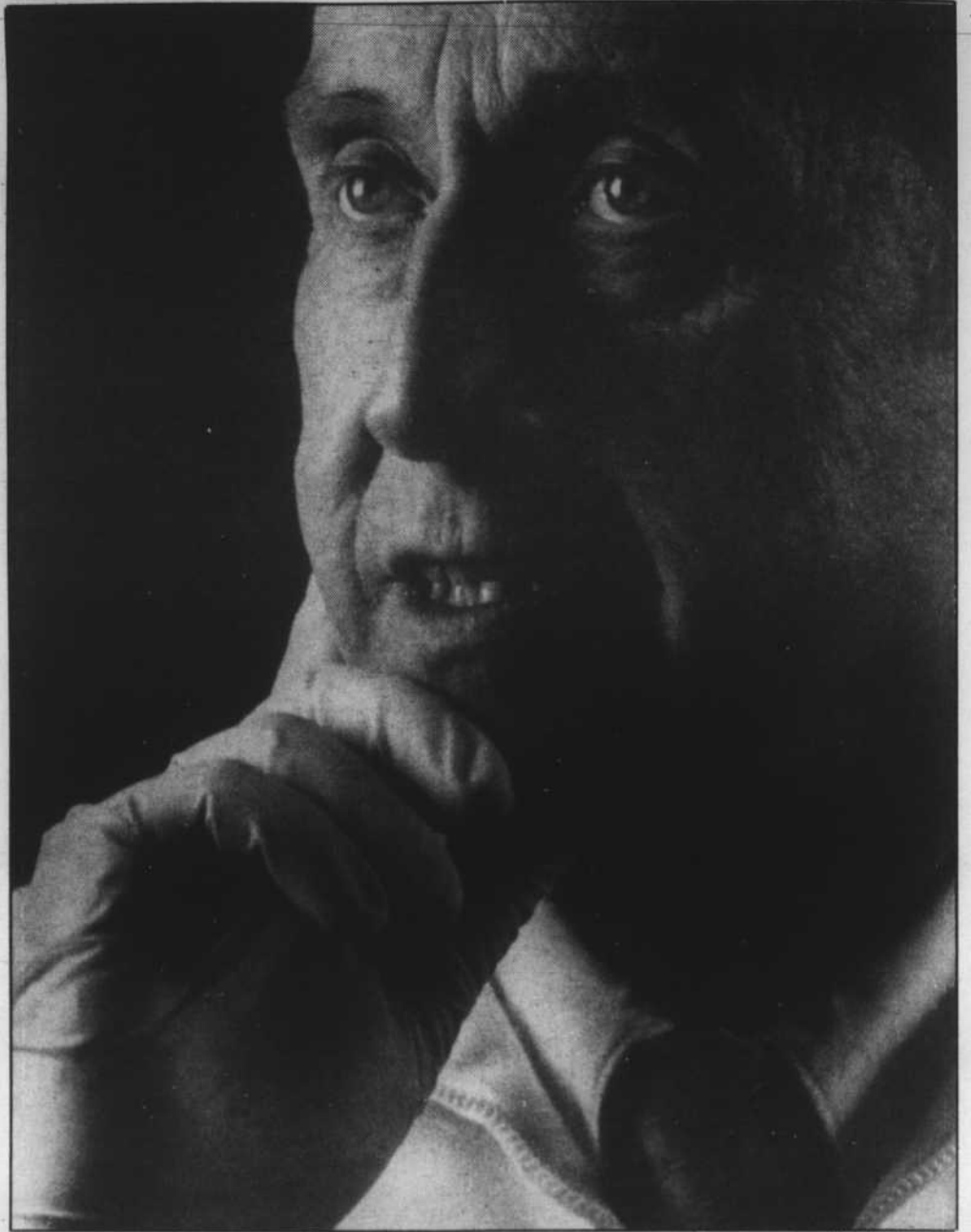


"I think it's criminal that a university the size of (the University of) Nebraska doesn't have a task force devoted to the prevention and awareness of HIV on campus."

-- Jean Durgin-Clinchard,
president of Cornhusker Parents and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays



Al Schaben/DN

Dr. Garland Bare, a physician at the University Health Center, said there could be between 40 and 80 students at UNL who are HIV positive.

UNL losing its focus on HIV, AIDS issues, student activist says

By Dionne Searcey

AIDS may be a worldwide epidemic, but on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, AIDS was more of an issue several years ago.

Officials argue whether this decrease in campuswide AIDS interest is because of less student demand for AIDS information or less concern about AIDS by university officials.

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, said the AIDS issue had dwindled on the UNL campus in the eyes of students and administrators, alike. "It's been a while since a reporter has asked me about AIDS," he said.

Dr. Garland Bare, a University Health Center physician, said student interest in AIDS shifted with news events involving the disease. When news events related to AIDS occur, more students call the center to find out the symptoms and signs of AIDS and whether they are at risk, he said.

"There was a big rush of people after Magic Johnson's announcement," he said. Basketball player Johnson retired from the game in October after announcing he was HIV-positive.

But now the center is back down to about one call a week, Bare said.

"People forget real quickly," he said. "It has been estimated that about 40 to 80 students at UNL are HIV positive."

Those numbers were the results of two different studies.

One study came from university campuses across the United States with similar student bodies to the Lincoln campus, Bare said. At these schools, one out of 300 students was HIV positive.

UNL was not included in this study. But comparatively, Bare said, this would mean UNL could have 80 students who are HIV positive.

The second estimate came from a military survey of men and women who are of similar age to traditional college students, which found that one out of 600 surveyed was HIV positive.

This survey, compared to UNL's undergraduate enrollment of about 24,000, would mean that 40 students at UNL could be HIV positive.

Griesen said he thought these numbers were inaccurate.

"That sounds high to me," he said. "Maybe we don't have anyone with AIDS (at UNL)."



Al Schaben/DN

The University Health Center provides many resources for students to learn more about HIV and AIDS.

But Paul Moore, co-chairman of the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Student Association, said he personally knew a student enrolled at UNL who was HIV positive.

Because UNL officials don't know how many students are directly hurt by HIV, Moore questioned the university's efforts to promote AIDS awareness.

"What has the university done in the last year to make people aware of the risks or what life is like for people living with AIDS?" Moore asked. "We're at the same place we were in 1981."

He said UNL did a better job of dealing with the disease in 1987 when Griesen's office appointed an AIDS task force to educate the university about HIV.

Janet Crawford, a health educator/instructor at the health center, said that in 1990 the task force was left in "limbo" when chairwoman Margaret Nellis left UNL to accept a job in Maryland. Crawford said the medical director who was on the committee also had resigned.

Griesen said the task force was created during the beginning years of AIDS awareness to educate the community about AIDS.

"It was in the early stages when there was a lot of miscommunication about the disease," he said.

The task force also promoted safe health practices and advised the university about certain guidelines to be followed in health care.

"It worked very well. It was very active," Griesen said.

Judith Kriss, interim coordinator of women's programs and services at the UNL Women's Resource Center, agreed.

"The AIDS task force kept AIDS as a real issue on this campus," she said.

Griesen said the purpose of the task force was accomplished.

"So much of what the task force was doing has been institutionalized," he said. "It's been a long time since I've heard anything like, 'I'm afraid to use the toilet because I'll get AIDS.'"

Jean Durgin-Clinchard, president of Cornhusker Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (a group that sponsors the local AIDS Support Group), said UNL still needs an AIDS task force.

"I think it's criminal that the university the size of (the University of) Nebraska doesn't have a task force devoted to the prevention and awareness of HIV on campus," she said.

"College students need all the support they can get."

Griesen said that if he knew many UNL students were HIV positive or had special needs dealing with AIDS, he would re-activate the task force.

"We don't have a task force on chlamydia. We don't have a task force on genital warts," and those are serious problems on campus, he said.

Crawford said a new director for the health center would arrive in June. Crawford plans to discuss whether to re-activate the task force with the new director, she said.

Kriss said that besides the absence of a task force, UNL lacks confidential testing for the HIV virus. "We're sending out the message that we're not accepting responsibility for that health care aspect," she said.

Dr. Bare said the University Health Center stopped offering confidential AIDS testing in July because of budget cuts.

The health center still can test for AIDS, Bare said. But these test results would appear on medical and insurance records, he said, and could lead to job discrimination.

Crawford said confidential AIDS testing was provided a short distance from campus at the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, 2200 St. Mary's Ave.

"With having a center or test site so close to campus, I hope that fulfills the need," Crawford said.

Bare said the health center could follow AIDS patients and treat them after they had been diagnosed.

Bare said he used to follow three HIV-positive patients a semester.

"This is the first semester since 1985 I have not been following an HIV-positive patient," Bare said.

He said if any UNL students were HIV positive, such patients probably were turning to community physicians. This

happens because, as students, the patients would be forced to end their care from a health center doctor after graduation, he said.

Although UNL offers no confidential testing, he said, the university offers AIDS information resources. UNL's campus ministers are equipped to counsel HIV-positive patients.

He said residence hall health aides also were trained to deal with AIDS issues. Lectures about AIDS awareness are sponsored by UNL throughout the year, Bare said.

Students affected by AIDS can receive help at the University Mental Health Clinic or University Counseling Center, he said.

Kriss said she was not satisfied with UNL's AIDS resources.

"I don't think that's enough," Kriss said, particularly because the counseling center does not have a specific counseling program set aside for AIDS issues.

Moore said he thought changes needed to be made to update services to students affected by AIDS.

The Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Student Association has "more current information than the health center. That's very wrong," Moore said.

Kriss said UNL should offer more AIDS awareness and support programs.

"We have to offer all sorts of things to let the university be aware that AIDS is a possibility and a problem," Kriss said.

The university does not offer AIDS support groups, Griesen said, but students can turn to city or county programs for help.

"We're not in the middle of nowhere, nor are we in New York," he said. "Lincoln's students are in a city where campus and community merge."

When students find out that UNL offers no support groups they might think: "Oh my god. UNL has no AIDS support group. They're not concerned," he said.

But officials on campus are concerned about the AIDS issue, he said. They just haven't been confronted by students who say an AIDS support group is a real need.

Crawford said it's hard for the university officials to respond to needs if administrators don't know about them.

"It's not like a student who's HIV positive has come forth and said, 'I'm not receiving the care I need.'"

Crawford said she encouraged students to offer input.

"People could just anonymously drop us a line," she said. "If that's something they want, write me and let me know."

"It's real hard to make any changes... if people won't come to us." ◆