**Fight AIDS with Awareness, not Morals**

World AIDS Day is not a commemoration of HIV "victims" as A. Arif Hussain put it in his column ["Other Diseases Overshadowed by AIDS", Dec. 7]. World AIDS Day is a unit- ed worldwide effort to support people living with AIDS, including friends and family of those infected with HIV. It is meant to educate the public on prevention and urge people to take action against the spread of this disease.

Despite all efforts, there are those who will treat this disease as a moral issue instead of the public health matter it has been all along. We are making a big deal out of AIDS, but that is because it is a big deal. AIDS is now the leading cause of death among men between the ages 25 and 44 in the United States, and the fourth leading cause among American women in the same age group, according to the Center for Disease Control's Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report.

Hussain says that cancer and heart disease take more lives across the globe, but fails to realize that the target age group that AIDS dermatologists does indeed make it the world's greatest killer. Because of its devastating effects on the 25-44 year old age group, it is destroying a large portion of the world's most economically, intellectually, and artistically productive people.

Although many MIT students may not yet belong to this age group, this statistic reflects the number of people with AIDS, and not necessarily all those infected with HIV. We need to act responsibly now to prevent ourselves from becoming another statistic in a few years.

AIDS is also taking a huge toll on the health care system and has the potential to wreak political havoc in many developing countries. We need to make it our job to bring attention to AIDS.

The good news is that we are not "stuck" as Hussain said, when it comes to HIV infection. The majority of cases are preventable. However, if Hussain claims that AIDS awareness and education programs are "worthless propaganda" and that money for research "compromises(s) the lives of millions by diverting scarce resources," how else are we to prevent the spread of HIV infection? From my experience as a Medlink here at MIT, many people still do not know exactly what constitutes risky behavior. Even for those who do know, there is evidence that they have yet to reconcile their own behavior with their knowledge and reality. In a survey of Boston University students, 80 percent said that they know that condoms help prevent HIV infection. But 72 percent of Boston University students admitted that they do not always use condoms ["Time to Act," World AIDS Day Newsletter, Dec. 1]. This is evidence that awareness and education are still needed if we are to prevent the spread of this disease.

We must resist the inclination to regard AIDS as a moral issue. Are sick people any less deserving of assistance and support just because someone has chosen to pass a moral judgment on them? HIV is a virus. It does not discriminate, so why should we be selective about giving assistance?

Every awareness and education campaign I have observed has made it clear that complete abstinence is the only foolproof method of prevention. However, procrastinating campaigns tend to fail on dead ends. Therefore, other forms of education, what Hussain merely calls "attention," are used to fulfill one goal of AIDS education. This includes the education and skills necessary to reduce the risk of getting HIV.

The true nature of our preoccupation with the disease is not what Hussain claims—a refusal to give up promiscuous behavior. It is fear—fear that this disease will touch our lives in some way. This fear comes from the fact that this is the first time we, as a developed nation, have had to deal with an infectious disease on this scale in decades. In addition, there does not seem to be any music bullet, like the lifesaving antibiotic or effective vaccine, on the way soon. However, because so many cases are completely preventable, we must persist with what Hussain calls "worthless propaganda." We call it education and prevention. Whatever form it takes, it fights something as insidious as HIV itself—"an out of sight, out of mind" attitude.

For more information or resources on HIV, members of the MIT community can contact the Health Education Office (E3-205). Mail stop (3-2123), or a Tork in Medlink in their living groups.

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