A Squeeze-In at the Summit

November 1, 1999 By Julie Boler

Two hundred gay guys gathered in a conference room are contracting their pelvic muscles, practicing Kegel exercises. The collective squeeze, long used by women to prolong orgasm and long neglected as pertinent to men's sexual pleasure, concluded a rain-soaked July weekend in Boulder, Colorado, for the Gay Men's Health Summit, which hosted health care practitioners, researchers and activists. After gleefully leading attendees through the closing session's self-help lesson, Daniel Wolfe, author of the upcoming *The GMHC Guide to Gay Men's Health*, said, "It's not appropriate in 1999 for a gay man to go to a doctor who doesn't know how to take care of him." Several hundred conference-goers left Boulder primed to change that.

In workshops with titles such as "Raw Data" (barebacking) and "The Dick: A User's Guide" (hmm...), presenters challenged participants to take prickly issues by the horns and wrestle with them. Moving AIDS and gay men's health and sexuality out of a crisis mentality and into a holistic health approach--viewed as revolutionary just three years ago--now seemed integrated into the philosophies of many. Yes, I still heard loud and clear that HIV is a fundamental issue for gay men. So much of what they know about themselves is a result of all the work they have done--and will do--around AIDS. But gay men's health--their bodies and lives, for those with or without HIV--encompasses more than the virus.

In that vein, I heard HIV positive men impatiently demanding that researchers be specific about risks of reinfection and other STDs. I heard prevention workers seizing the chance to talk about aging, drug use, anal health and homophobia. I heard party boys and gym bunnies praise the venues where they bond, far away from support groups and their desks at ASOs.

That last dynamic was evident in a hot talk on party circuit culture--a packed session scheduled for a ballsy 8:30 am Friday time slot--in which the complexities of promoting health while still honoring pleasure as a health issue were handled with smart, sophisticated care, reaching out to men often depicted as deliriously drugged and dancing "at the very pulse point of risk."

The summit's discussions demanded endurance and vision. Kind of like Kegel exercises. So if you see your favorite gay guy frozen at the fax machine--looking like he's concentrating *really* hard--give him a supportive pat and a moment to himself. He may be participating in a vital new gay health movement that will help all of us.

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