Daddy’s Helper

Legislator burns to ban Viagra for PWAs

November 1, 1998 By Scott Hess

Alabama state legislator Larry Sims (R-Eastaboga) boned up for re-election votes in August with a cocky campaign kicker: Make it criminal to prescribe the anti-impotency drug Viagra, or any other sexual aid, to PWAs. “Viagra enhances the ability of an individual to spread the AIDS virus,” said Sims, also a registered nurse. “And saying that the use of a condom is a safe way to stop the spread of AIDS is more irresponsible than prescribing Viagra.” His plan would not stop at married or monogamous couples, he said, as there is no guarantee of the Viagra-user’s faithfulness. Sims, who also wants to ban state Medicaid coverage of Viagra even though federal rules require it, said that while he has no stiff evidence, he is “reasonably sure” that some Alabama AIDS clinics are prescribing the penis-perking pill to PWAs—and that, he said, is “gross malpractice.”

The nutty news came as the demand for Pfizer’s Viagra softened (’scrips dropped to 184,312 in July from a peak of 303,424 in May, though it remains one of the nation’s hottest-selling drugs, set to reach $1 billion in its first year), controversy sizzled around insurance reimbursements, and 39 Viagra-related deaths (including men who used it with poppers) hit the wire.

ASOs such as New York City’s GMHC have held educational forums to address the pill’s interaction with anti-HIV meds, antidepressants and recreational drugs. Another topic: implications of increased sexual activity for HIV prevention. GMHC prevention pro Richard Elovich said that Viagra vexations are based largely on “homophobic mythology.” Most attendees were “HIV positive men who experienced sexual dysfunction as a result of protease drugs or being ill—not men interested in using Viagra to party and have more sex.”

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