Milestones

February 1, 2001 By Denny Lee

Partnerships

The American Academy of HIV Medicine, a new group of AIDS clinicians, announced in October that it has recruited 500 doctors serving about 100,000 HIVers. The group plans to unify the diverse backgrounds of HIV specialists ranging from internists to oncologists and to advocate for improved, more coordinated treatment. “There hasn’t been anyone to represent the special needs and views of this field,” said treasurer Stephen Boswell,MD, executive director of Fenway Community Health in Boston. “Until now.”

Trials

Project Inform won a court order of protection in November against the HIV denialist group ACT UP/San Francisco for threatening its staff and clients at an April meeting. In a separate case, a jury also found the group guilty of criminal assault for spraying the city’s health director with Silly String at a prevention meeting. Project Inform founder Martin Delaney compared the group’s tactics to militant anti-abortion activists who use threats of physical assault to convey their message. “In my view,this is a form of terrorism,” he said. Because the jury deadlocked or acquitted ACT UP/SF members on more serious charges, including battery, the group also claimed a victory.

A public relations firm hired by Schering-Plough to build awareness of its hepatitis C treatment through the creation of state patient-advocacy coalitions -- the manufactured grass-roots strategy is known in the biz as “Astroturf” -- threatened to sue a bona fide advocate, Brian Klein, for slamming the strategy as “unethical and misleading.” In October, lawyers for the Perry Communications Group in San Francisco vowed to take “whatever necessary legal action” to prevent Klein, head of the Hepatitis C Action and Advocacy Coalition, from further criticism. Klein responded by publicizing the threat in a mass e-mail.

Mario Poulin, a New Hampshire HIVer who was refused a routine urology examination, brought a bias complaint against his doctor in November. “I felt like a disease,” Poulin said. The incident took place on April 6 at the office of Gary Dunetz, MD. Although cases challenging the “direct threat defense” have been won by PWAs nationwide, Poulin’s lawyers at the Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders said that unfounded fears about HIV still plague many medical settings.

Awards

The National AIDS Memorial Grove, a seven-acre reserve in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park,

received $500,000 funding from the state, presented by California assemblywoman Carole Migden. An endowment pays for maintenance by a city gardener, but much of the leafy glen's upkeep is done on monthly Saturday afternoons, which draw up to 300 volunteers. "Gardening is meditative," executive director Thom Wey and says. "Working close to the ground becomes cathartic. It's about renewal."

Deaths

Parks Mankahlana, who served as spokesperson both for Nelson Mandela in the first post-apartheid elections and for President Thabo Mbeki, died August 24at the age of 36. Although he was credited with expanding press access after decades of restrictions, Mankahlana became a lightning rod for controversy during last year's debates about AIDS dissenters, when he said that the Durban Declaration affirming that HIV causes AIDS belonged "in the trash." The cause of death still remains unknown,despite calls to the government to confirm or deny rumors of AIDS.

Michael Rosano, a New York city and state political insider and leading advocate for PWA and gay rights, died October 12 after a brief battle with melanoma. Rosano, 42, was an ACT UP regular for years and held many positions with elected officials in New York before joining the Empire State Pride Agenda and the Anti-Violence Project as political director. In 1998, he moved to Albany to serve as press secretary for state Senate Minority Leader Martin Connor. "Despite being an insider," says activist and friend Bill Dobbs, "Michael had guts, and he wasn't afraid to open his mouth."

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