

The New York Times

RARE CANCER SEEN IN 41 HOMOSEXUALS

New York Times Company Jul 3, 1981

Doctors in New York and California have diagnosed among homosexual men 41 cases of a rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer. Eight of the victims died less than 24 months after the diagnosis was made.

The cause of the outbreak is unknown, and there is as yet no evidence of contagion. But the doctors who have made the diagnoses, mostly in New York City and the San Francisco Bay area, are alerting other physicians who treat large numbers of homosexual men to the problem in an effort to help identify more cases and to reduce the delay in offering chemotherapy treatment.

The sudden appearance of the cancer, called Kaposi's Sarcoma, has prompted a medical investigation that experts say could have as much scientific as public health importance because of what it may teach about determining the causes of more common types of cancer. First Appears in Spots

Doctors have been taught in the past that the cancer usually appeared first in spots on the legs and that the disease took a slow course of up to 10 years. But these recent cases have shown that it appears in one or more violet-colored spots anywhere on the body. The spots generally do not itch or cause other symptoms, often can be mistaken for bruises, sometimes appear as lumps and can turn brown after a period of time. The cancer often causes swollen lymph glands, and then kills by spreading throughout the body.

MYSTERIOUS DISEASE AFFLICTS GAYS

Copyright Boston Globe Newspaper Dec 10, 1981

A mysterious epidemic of rarely seen diseases, including a type of cancer endemic to Africa, is suddenly afflicting sexually promiscuous young men, most of them homosexual. So far the puzzle has baffled the nation's leading specialists in infectious disease and touched off the most intense medical sleuthing since toxic shock syndrome appeared on the scene last year.

Though the risk is numerically small, the death rate so far is "fearful," as one scientist put it.

The mechanism may be new in the annals of infectious disease: something in the environment of these men is apparently causing severe damage to normal immune defenses. This, in turn, sets the stage for uncontrollable infections by organisms that normally pose no threat, and can also unleash the rare cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma.

Some scientists believe the "something" is a very common virus called cytomegalovirus (CMV) that can be sexually transmitted. According to one hypothesis, repeated CMV infections can exhaust the body's immune system and leave it susceptible to organisms that are normally harmless.

Others think this is simplistic and suggest the immune defect is produced by a host of "lifestyle" factors, possibly including recreational drugs such as amylinitrite, an inhaled drug that users say heightens sexual orgasm.

"It will be very hard to separate these factors," said Dr. Clyde Crumpacker of Beth Israel Hospital, a specialist in the Herpes virus family that includes CMV.

The phenomenon is both "scary," to use a word employed by several scientists interviewed yesterday, and medically fascinating. Whatever the explanation, it promises to yield important insights in the complex interaction of infection, immune defenses and cancer.

The strange syndrome, first reported six months ago, has affected 180 men since 1979, with new cases being reported at a rate of five or six a week. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, 74 of the known victims, or 41 percent, have died of uncontrollable infections or of

Boston Globe

MYSTERIOUS DISEASE AFFLICTS GAYS

Richard A. Knox Globe Staff Dec 10, 1981

The mechanism may be new in the annals of infectious disease: something in the environment of these men is apparently causing severe damage to normal immune defenses. This, in turn, sets the stage for uncontrollable infections by organisms that normally pose no threat, and can also unleash the rare cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma.

The first extended scientific studies on the phenomenon appear in today's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. The three separate studies encompass 19 patients, two-thirds of whom died from pneumocystis pneumonia, Kaposi's sarcoma or other normally minor infections turned into killers by the lapse in immune defenses.

The typical victim is a homosexual man in his 30s who has multiple sex partners. He suffers for months from fatigue, low fever, weight loss, swollen lymph glands and a yeast infection called thrush (cottony white spots in the mouth and throat); he may then get an aggressive form of pneumonia, spreading ulcers in the anal or genital area, a severe fungal infection of the throat or esophagus, and sometimes the purplish skin spots or other hallmarks of Kaposi's sarcoma.

Fatal disease affects gay males

Blood donors warned about AIDS

By Marilyn Miller

The possibility of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), being transmitted through blood transfusions has led the American Red Cross to ask certain individuals from refraining from donating blood.

Late next month, when the Red Cross Bloodmobile arrives in Provincetown for the first blood drive of the year, all potential donors will be required to read a small pamphlet before giving blood.

The pamphlet will include an insert on AIDS pointing out this baffling new disease has appeared most frequently in sexually active gay and bisexual men, Haitians and intravenous drug users.

Individuals who fit into any of these categories will be asked to refrain from donating blood.

"There's good reason to suspect that sexual preference may be related to the disease, but we can't determine that," said Elizabeth Regan, a spokesman for the northeast region of the American Red Cross Blood Services, located in Needham.

"The course we're taking now is to tell all donors, not just gay donors, what the risks are and appeal to those in the high-risk categories not to donate blood," she said.

"We don't plan to ask the sexual preference of donors because of the legal and ethical aspects involved in that, but everybody who donates blood will have to sign a certificate attesting that they have read the brochure, to which we'll add an insert on AIDS," Regan said.

Mrs. Mary J. Avellar, chairman of the Provincetown blood drive, said several gay men regularly donate blood to the Red Cross during the Bloodmobile drives.

"We do have a few who have been giving blood for years and I would trust them, but I think that'll have to be up

to the nurses in charge," Avellar said.

Regan said nurses on the Bloodmobile won't ask donors if they are gay or use drugs intravenously.

"But if donors have reason to suspect they might have been exposed to AIDS, they will be expected to self-select" and abstain from donating blood, she said.

AIDS has afflicted about 1,000 people in the United States over the past few years. The cause of the disease is unknown. Its effect renders individuals highly susceptible to unusual forms of infection and/or cancer, according to the Red Cross insert that will appear in the brochure for potential donors.

"AIDS, although found in the general population, has appeared most frequently in some sexually active gay and bisexual males, some Haitian entrants, and two groups particularly vulnerable to blood-transmitted infection--intravenous drug users and hemophiliacs. To date, most cases have occurred in California and New York," the insert states.

"Although not proven, it is suspected that AIDS may be transmitted through intimate contact or by blood. The risk of AIDS in gay and bisexual males appears to increase with the number, as well as the anonymity, of different sex partners. Any individual with AIDS, or who has had intimate contact with someone with AIDS, should not be a blood donor," the insert states.

There is no cure for AIDS at this point, nor is there any dependable test for detecting this disease.

Some cases of AIDS brought on by blood transfusions have been reported, although not in the New England area, Regan said.

"Massachusetts does have some AIDS cases, but no transfusion-related cases are under investigation here," she said. "The real areas of concern are California and New

York."

None the less, to be on the safe side, the Red Cross is "appealing to all community-spirited individuals who belong to any of the higher risk groups for AIDS not to donate blood at this time," she said.

Although Provincetown has a large gay population, no cases of AIDS have been reported here, said Eileen "Honey" Andrews, town health agent, and Alice Foley, town nurse.

"I would hear if we had it, and I haven't heard of any cases yet," said Andrews. "The ones reported are in Boston."

Foley, however, said private physicians are not required to report AIDS cases to the health department, so there might be individuals in town being treated for the disease.