

By Kay Longcope
Globe Staff

Clinic urged to provide experimental AIDS drug

AIDS

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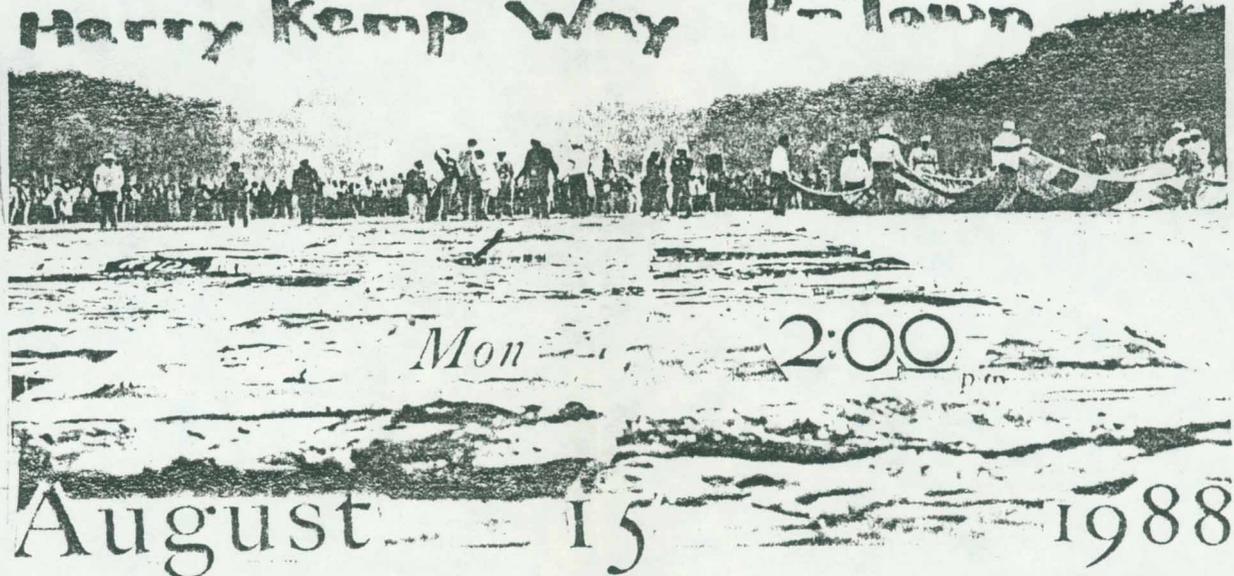


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OUTER CAPE HEALTH SERVICES

Harry Kemp Way P-Town



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PROVINCETOWN POSITIVE/PEOPLE WITH AIDS COALITION
PO Box 1465, Provincetown, MA 02657
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PROVINCETOWN - About 30 members and supporters of the local People With AIDS Coalition protested yesterday at the offices of Outer Cape Health Services, demanding that the facility make available a drug widely viewed as prolonging the lives of people with AIDS.

The demonstration was the latest in a series of actions targeting community-based health services, which protesters say are not moving quickly enough to provide aerosol pentamidine.

The federal Food and Drug Administration has approved experimental use of the drug to treat pneumocystis pneumonia, the No. 1 killer of people with AIDS.

Keith Donahue, 35, of Provincetown, obtained aerosol pentamidine from a New York clinic in March shortly after contracting pneumonia. Donahue said he and others are living in fear of recurrence because the drug is unavailable here.

"Statistics show that not many people with AIDS survive the second time around," said John Ryan, 41, Donahue's companion.

Since spring, Donahue and Ryan, co-founders of Provincetown's PWA coalition, have tried without success to have a community-based facility make the treatment available.

"There's a lot of controversy round this issue," Heather Hersee of the Fenway Community Health Center in Boston said. "We've dispensed the treatment since January, when other facilities were not administering it. People are upset that it's not more readily available."

Outer Cape administrator cott Penn blamed Medicaid reimbursement policies for the lack of availability.

"We have no choice but to work within the system. The scrutiny the state and federal governments put on us by virtue of our cense and funding requires that we do everything legally," he said.

"It would be politically expedient to say we'll do it anyhow, but that would mean risking the whole clinic's future," Penn said. "The fantasy out there is that there's some sort of conspiracy to keep this from people, and nothing could be further from the truth."

Marion Roth, a Provincetown photographer and vice president of the PWA coalition, said, "We believe there is a difference between finding the best way to preserve the health of the institution and the health of the community."

Hersee said the Fenway clinic receives Medicaid reimbursement on a case-by-case basis.

"There is a stipulation that patients have to have prior approval," she said. "Once they get prior approval, we can be reimbursed for administering aerosol pentamidine."

"We can't be reimbursed until patients are approved to receive the drug," Hersee added. "We have no reason to believe Medicaid procedures work any differently for anybody else."

Roth said the treatment has been promised "for the last six months, and it keeps on being two weeks, two weeks, two weeks."

"We have two new cases of pneumocystis pneumonia in town," Roth said. "People with AIDS don't have time to wait."