



A TRIBUTE TO NOEL WALSH (1960–2008) FROM THE GAY HEALTH NETWORK

WE WERE DEEPLY SHOCKED AND SADDENED TO LEARN OF THE RECENT DEATH OF OUR ESTEEMED COLLEAGUE, FRIEND, AND FELLOW AIDS ACTIVIST, NOEL WALSH.

In the last 14 years Noel attended and presented at many HIV and Sexual Health conferences both in Ireland and abroad. Sadly, it was soon after organising an International Conference for People Living with HIV in Norway that he died.

The HIV health editor of GCN, Noel's column was read widely and, as a result, he was contacted by many gay men with sexual health problems or who were newly diagnosed with HIV. He wouldn't hesitate to meet with these people, or others who were referred by the many health service providers. Each year he was involved in organising the Friends for Friends special Christmas dinner in support of HIV organisations.

Importantly, Noel represented HIV-positive people on the Irish Government's National AIDS Strategy Committee and its sub-committees, Care & Management, and Prevention & Education. In 2007 and 2008, he was the devoted chairperson of the Irish Stamp Out Stigma Campaign, again investing his efforts to make this a success. In 2006, through Positive Voices, he held workshops in Derry (where they love and have adopted him) and was instrumental in formulating the Irish Charter of Rights for People Living with HIV.

From early on, Noel was an active and invaluable member of the Gay Health Network (GHN). He contributed significant time and effort to publications such as the Play Safe Play Sexy booklet, and the more recent PEP booklet, for which he was the driving force, and also advocated for the availability of the treatment. Over the past year, Noel was a huge part of the evaluation and development of new plans for GHN, and promoted the research on the needs of gay and bisexual men living with HIV, for which an advisory team has just been established.

Over the years Noel had his share of medical problems, including the loss of sight, but he never complained. He was great fun, cheerful, wicked, stubborn, determined, and he certainly could rock the boat, but above all he was an unrepentant gay champion for all people living with HIV and AIDS. Much loved by everyone he met, he remains an inspirational figure who will be sorely missed by us all, especially we at GHN.

Shortly before he died, Noel wrote some of the articles included in this newsletter.

Our thoughts are with Noel's partner Maurice, and his family. May he rest in peace.

Mick Quinlan, GMHS & Gay Health Network. ▶▶▶▶▶

'Like so many organisations working on LGBT issues, we were deeply saddened by the loss of Noel. Noel's talent, passion and drive were obvious to anyone who had the pleasure to work alongside him. He had the unique talent of being able to inject humour into any situation, and a searing honesty which was both refreshing and inspiring. Noel was always interested in BeLonG To, and was a great supporter of our work. Of course we will miss him for the support and voice he gave to people often under-represented, but just as importantly, we will miss him as our good friend'. From everyone at BeLonG To (www.belongto.org) ▶▶▶▶▶

'We were all deeply saddened to learn of the death of Noel, our colleague and friend. Noel was very supportive of the work of Dublin AIDS Alliance where many staff, past and present, worked closely with him on committees and campaigns. He was a powerful voice for people living with HIV and AIDS, both in Ireland and abroad, and his loss leaves a silence that will be difficult to fill. We will miss him, and continue to mourn the loss of a great AIDS Activist and dear friend'. From everyone at Dublin AIDS Alliance. ▶▶▶▶▶

Noel played an important part of educating the members of Johnny about living with HIV. Noel was a wonderful man who always made time for us and our group. We have been very privileged to have been involved in working with Noel and his recent passing was a shock to all the group. The group extends their sympathy to Maurice Noel's partner, and his family. He will be greatly missed by the group. Ar dheis Dé go raib sé. From everyone at Johnny. ▶▶▶▶▶

Noel your laughter has left us. Your beam of light stays with us. Shine on. From everyone at The Sexual Health Centre. (www.sexualhealthcentre.com) ▶▶▶▶▶



NEW FIGURES HAVE RECENTLY BEEN PUBLISHED BY THE HEALTH PROTECTION SURVEILLANCE CENTRE ON HIV AND AIDS IN IRELAND.

The HPSC report for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2008 shows there were 170 newly diagnosed HIV infections, a 16% decrease compared to the same period in 2007. This brings the cumulative total of HIV infections reported up to the end of June 2008 to 4,951, and the cumulative total relating to men who have sex with men (MSM) to 1,074. A summary of the figures relating to MSM derived from the report is as follows:

- Of the 170 newly diagnosed cases, probable route of transmission was known for 127 cases. Of these 127 cases, 29 (22.8%) were among MSM, compared to 36 for the same period in 2007.
- 24% were aged under 30, 55% under 40, 79% under 50, and 97% were under 60.
- Of the 21 cases where geographic origin is known, 48% were born abroad, with 50% of these from Western European countries, and 20% from Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Of the 22 cases where area of residence was known, 68% resided in the HSE Eastern Region (Dublin, Wick low & Kildare), and the balance elsewhere.

A full report on the statistics is available at www.hpsc.ie. ▶▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶▶ HIV AND AIDS EDUCATION AND PREVENTION PLAN 2008 - 2012

IN JUNE 2008, THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND FOOD SAFETY, MARY WALLACE TD, LAUNCHED THE HIV AND AIDS EDUCATION AND PREVENTION PLAN 2008–2012, PRESENTED BY THE EDUCATION AND PREVENTION SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL AIDS STRATEGY COMMITTEE.

The Action Plan, launched to mark Irish AIDS Day (15th June), demonstrates the commitment of all key stakeholders to continuing and enhancing efforts to prevent HIV and AIDS. The Minister remarked "the HIV and AIDS Education and Prevention Plan is both timely and necessary. HIV is a preventable disease and this plan gives clear guidance on how the Irish system should progress its prevention efforts". The role of civil society groups, such as the Gay Health Network, in working within communities to deliver relevant educational messages is recognised in the plan.

Under six key action areas, the plan addresses the need of seven population groups. Men who have sex with Men (MSM) are identified as one such group.

The plan recommends the following actions:

- Education & Awareness Raising, including national information campaigns, harm-minimisation information to address degrees of risk-taking and the effects of alcohol and other drugs, and improved availability to sexual health promotion information, in particular outside of cities.

- Specific interventions with primary care and mental health providers to increase their knowledge of the health and social needs of MSM.
- Increasing screening and testing, including expanding opportunities for HIV screening and testing in the community setting.
- Research, to increase the evidence base informing strategic policy recommendations.
- Specific interventions among MSM to clarify misconceptions about safer sex, build communication skills for negotiating safer sex, and address interpersonal issues that may interfere with safer sex.

A copy of the Plan, and recommended actions, is available for download at: http://www.dohc.ie/publications/hivaids_education.html ▶▶▶▶▶



**HIV and AIDS
Education and Prevention Plan
2008 - 2012**



THE XVII INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE TOOK PLACE IN MEXICO AUGUST 2008. THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS IN RELATION TO MSM.

• HEPATITIS C

The prevalence of Hepatitis C infection among HIV-positive gay men attending a large Amsterdam sexual health clinic is 18% and rising, reported Anouk Urbanus at the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City on August 7th. Anonymous surveys were conducted at the clinic in May 2007, November 2007 and April 2008. A total of 3,125 people took part in the survey, but almost four-fifths were heterosexual men and women, amongst whom hepatitis C prevalence was low at 0.3%. Moreover, prevalence was also low among HIV-negative gay men at 0.4% (2 of 532 men). However, among HIV-positive gay men, 18% had Hepatitis C (28 of 157 men). Comparing the results between the three surveys, prevalence rose from 15% to 17% and then to 21%. Just under a third of these men were unaware of their infection. A multivariate analysis showed that Hepatitis C infection in gay men was associated with being HIV positive, fisting, and intravenous drug use. However, it is important to note that only 18% of the co-infected gay men reported intravenous drug use. The study confirms that Hepatitis C appears to be more contagious sexually than previously thought, particularly for those who are HIV positive.

• HIV ON THE INCREASE AMONGST GAY MEN

"This epidemic never ceases to surprise us. In every major city in Asia we have looked at, there are now epidemics of HIV among men who have sex with men (MSM) – epidemics that remind me of what we saw in the USA and Europe in the 1980s. HIV is now rising as fast in those men as it was then." This was the warning given by Peter Piot, retiring Director of UN AIDS at a meeting on MSM preceding the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, organised by the Global Forum on MSM (see www.msmandhiv.org). The conference heard that when populations of MSM were surveyed, the prevalence of HIV amongst them was without exception higher than in the general population, even in countries with large generalised epidemics. The lower the HIV prevalence in the general population, the greater the disparity between this and the prevalence in gay men. Thus in the only four countries so far surveyed in Africa, (Kenya, Senegal, Sudan and South Africa), gay men were 3.8 times more likely to have HIV than the general population; in Asia, 18.7 times more likely; and in the Americas, 33.3 times more likely. Prevalence was high in gay men even in countries with virtually no HIV in the general population; a survey from Alexandria in Egypt, for instance, had found 6.5% prevalence in gay men in a country where general prevalence is 0.01%.

Reports and news from the International AIDS Conference can be sourced at www.aids2008.org ▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶ NEW HIV FIGURES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

A REPORT ON THE FIGURES FOR NEW HIV DIAGNOSES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND WAS PUBLISHED IN AUGUST 2008.

The following is a summary of the report in relation to men who have sex with men (MSM):

- Of the 54 newly diagnosed cases, 24 were reported among MSM, compared to 153 for the twelve months of 2007.

- 33% (n=8) of newly diagnosed cases were among those aged 25-29.

- The cumulative total number of HIV infections among MSM reported to the end of June 2008 is 2,052.

A full report on HIV statistics for Northern Ireland can be sourced at www.hpa.org.uk ▶▶▶▶



Protecting people
Preventing harm
Preparing for threats

▶▶▶▶ UPDATE ON THE STAMP OUT STIGMA CAMPAIGN

*I'm living with my HIV.
And your stigma.*



THE FIRST NATIONAL REPORT ON HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION, COMPILING THE RESULTS OF THREE SEPARATE STUDIES, WAS PUBLISHED RECENTLY TO MARK WORLD AIDS DAY ON 1ST DECEMBER.

The study comprised of a phone survey of workplaces and schools, and a self-completed study by people living with HIV. It found that nearly half (49%) of people in Ireland living with HIV claim they are discriminated against by friends, while a significant number (28%) also say they face discrimination within their own families. Of those living with the virus, some 84% felt it was viewed negatively by society.

The report, published by Stamp Out Stigma, is a collaboration between Irish Aid, the Department of Health, people living with HIV, and national and international NGOs focused on HIV and sexual health, and is available to download on www.stampoutstigma.ie. ▶▶▶▶

ON THE ONE ROAD



HEPATITIS A OUTBREAK IN NORTHERN IRELAND (JAN 2009)



THE EASTERN HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD AND GUM CLINICS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE ADVISED OF A RECENT OUTBREAK OF HEPATITIS A IN NORTHERN IRELAND, PARTICULARLY IN THE BELFAST AREA, AND AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN.

Hepatitis A is extremely infectious and can make an infected person very ill. It is found in faeces and can spread very easily through the faecal/oral route. It can be transmitted through unprotected anal sex, rimming, and by touching your mouth after coming in contact with someone else's faeces/anus (e.g. following fingering, handling dirty condoms, etc.).

Symptoms of Hepatitis A include fatigue, fever, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea, weight loss, itching, and jaundice.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, you should contact your local GP or Sexual Health/GUM Clinic immediately. Alternatively, you can contact:

The Rainbow Project in Belfast
(Tel: 028 9031 9030 www.rainbow-project.org),

or the Gay Men's Health Service in Dublin
(Tel: 01 6699 553 www.gaymenshealthservice.ie),
for further information and advice. >>>>

REVIEW OF 6TH ALL IRELAND GAY HEALTH FORUM (GHF6)

GHF6

ON THE ONE ROAD

THE 6TH ALL IRELAND GAY HEALTH FORUM (GHF6) WAS HELD IN DUBLIN CASTLE IN JUNE 2008. LAUNCHING GHF6, THE MINISTER FOR STATE MARY WALLACE ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH AN EVENT AND THE INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE GAY MEN'S HEALTH SERVICE, HSE.

It goes without saying that once again GHF was made possible by the contributions and involvement (freely given) by over 20 people from around Ireland and abroad. Their co-operation, along with the support of the Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Health, GMHS, HSE and

Gay Health Network helps to keep the costs low and the forum freely accessible and successful.

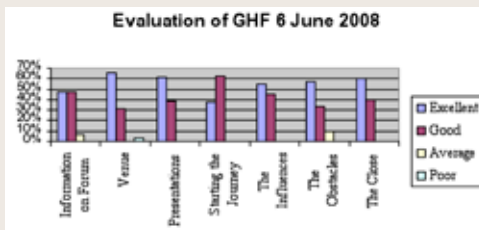
There were 15 presentations and 8 workshops on various topics on the day, and as can be seen in the evaluation chart, most presentations and workshops were received very well by those in attendance.

Presentations and workshops cited as most useful on the day included the HIV & AIDS Update, Leadership and Coaching for HIV Positive People, the GHN Review and Plan, the Health Impact on Migrant MSM, Women's Health & Well Being Research Project, HIV and Poppers, LGBT Young People & Drugs, Gay Men and Problematic Drug & Alcohol Use, and the Sex Workers Alliance. It is intended to have some of the presentations available on

www.gaymenshealthservice.ie in the near future.

Very sadly, GHF6 was the last conference where Noel Walsh presented, and it will never be the same again without his special presentation style, wit, and a bit of controversy. Noel would of course want us to continue, and the Gay Men's Health Service is pleased to announce and dedicate to Noel's memory The 7th All Ireland Gay Health Forum (GHF7), which will take place on Friday 12th June 2009 in the Bedford Hall Suite, Dublin Castle.

Suggestions for presentations and workshops are welcome. For early registration please email gmhsadmin@hse.ie, or telephone Mick Quinlan at 01-6699553. >>>>



GHN HAS LAUNCHED A NEW BEBO PAGE

CHECK OUT

<http://www.bebo.com/gayhealthnetwork>
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RUBBER UP

▶▶▶▶ MEN ARE VULNERABLE



A REVIEW OF TRENDS IN SYPHILIS, HIV AND ACUTE HEPATITIS B

[Extracts from a poster presentation from Public Health Specialists from the HSE's Health Protection East and Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) presented at the Focus on Infection RCPI Dublin, December 2008]

The rise of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in Ireland is similar to trends seen in the UK and Europe over the past 15 years. In Ireland, male gender bias is seen across a range of STIs from Chlamydia and NSU, to Gonorrhoea and Syphilis. In 2006 two thirds of STI notifications were in men.

SYPHILIS

Large outbreaks of infectious syphilis have been reported from Dublin and other major cities in Europe. Between 2000 and 2006, 1,596 case-based notifications of syphilis were received in Departments of Public Health in Ireland. These cases mostly affected men who have sex with men (MSM) residing in the Eastern Region. There was a relative lull in numbers in 2003 to 2005, a gradual shift upwards from 2006, with 2008 seeing a more dramatic increase. Almost all new cases in 2008 are in males. A concurrent rise in the proportion of male cases co-infected with HIV is also apparent (26% in 2008 compared with 4% during the peak years 2000-2004). The average age of acquiring infection in 2008 was 36 years (age range 19-59 years).

HIV

Worldwide, HIV affects more women than men. However, in Ireland, newly diagnosed cases continue to affect men more than women. Over the years 2003-2007, three quarters of all newly reported cases were in men, who, while having fewer cases of heterosexual transmission, accounted for all MSM and almost twice the numbers of cases in intravenous drug users (IDUs).

ACUTE INFECTIOUS HEPATITIS B

Over the period 2004 to 2007 males outnumber females in new acute cases of Hepatitis B by a factor of 4 to 1. Most acute cases (>62%) in males are sexually acquired with 20% having no known risk factor; whereas in females less than half of the cases are sexually acquired with just 10% having no known risk factor. Most of the male sexually acquired cases are in MSM. However a quarter of all new acute cases are in men exposed to known heterosexual transmission. Public health investigation reveals that many of these cases are also travel related.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Men are shown to have the highest numbers of serious STIs of Syphilis, HIV and Hepatitis B in Ireland in recent years. Men are less likely to declare a probable route of transmission compared to women for acute Hepatitis B. While MSM are most vulnerable in terms of Syphilis and HIV, men engaged in heterosexual sex are also vulnerable to acute Hepatitis B. There was a major media and health promotion campaign during the syphilis outbreak in the early years of this decade which resulted in a change in behaviour and reduction of new cases. However, there is a definite deterioration in the trends with men predominating in all infections, and ways of reaching the most vulnerable sexually active men of all ages (19-60 years), with particular emphasis on MSM, needs to be considered again.

Further details: Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald, HSE, email: mgt.fitzgerald@hse.ie

Statistics can be sourced at www.hpsc.ie ▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶ HSE LAUNCH NEW WEBSITE ON SEXUAL HEALTH

THE HSE LAUNCHED A NEW WEBSITE FOCUSING ON SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION IN DECEMBER 2008. THE WEBSITE IS PRIMARILY TARGETED AT YOUNG ADULTS (18+) AND INCLUDES INFORMATION ON HIV AND STIS, TESTING, AND WHERE TO GET ADVICE AND SUPPORT. SEE www.yoursexualhealth.ie FOR MORE.



▶▶▶▶ MEMBERSHIP



THE PURPOSE OF THE GAY HEALTH NETWORK IS TO PROMOTE HIV PREVENTION AND SEXUAL HEALTH AWARENESS AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN, WITH A FOCUS ON MEN LIVING WITH HIV, AND TO COMBAT THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH HIV.

Membership of the network is open to any individual or organisation with an interest in achieving this purpose. The commitment includes attendance at approximately 4 network meetings per year, and a contribution to one or more sub-committees to assist with projects from our 3-year work plan. We would very much welcome representatives of HIV-positive people throughout the country who could make an invaluable contribution to the network and its purpose.

Our 2009 projects will include a publication on Younger MSM and Sexual Health; a publication on Positive Sex for HIV-positive MSM; a mainstream publication on Safer Sex, HIV & STI Messages for MSM; and the commencement of Research on the Needs of HIV-positive MSM.

If you are interested in joining the network please contact Mick Quinlan (mick.quinlan@hse.ie) or Mirjam Bader (director@rainbow-project.org). ▶▶▶▶

📍X8@ www.gayhealthnetwork.ie

Safer Sex, HIV Testing, Syphilis, STI's and PEP Information in this Language for Men who have Sex with Men

Informacje w języku POLSKIM dla mężczyzn, którzy uprawiają seks z innymi mężczyznami, na temat bezpiecznego seksu, testów na HIV, syfilisu, chorób przenoszonych drogą płciową oraz profilaktyki stosowanej w przypadku narażenia się na zakażenie wirusem HIV

Información en Español para Hombres que practican el Sexo con Hombres sobre un Sexo más Seguro, la Prueba del VIH, Sífilis, ETS y PPE

Gnéas níos sábháilte, Tástáil VEID, Sífilis, GGT agus eolas maidir le PEP sa Teanga seo d'Fhir a mbíonn Gnéas acu le Fir

Sexe plus sûr, dépistage du VIH, syphilis, renseignements sur les maladies sexuellement transmissibles et sur la prophylaxie post-exposition en français pour des hommes qui ont des rapports sexuels avec d'autres hommes

Sexo Seguro, Teste de HIV, Sífilis, DST e PEP – Informações nesta língua (Portugues) para homens que fazem Sexo com homens

本语言版安全性交，人体免疫系统缺损检测，梅毒，性传播疾病及接触病毒后预防措施是为发生男男性交的男性提供

Безопасный секс, тестирование на ВИЧ, сифилис, венерические заболевания, информация о Профилактическом лечении после подвержения риску (PEP) Информация на этом языке для мужчин, имеющих сексуальные контакты с мужчинами

www.gayhealthnetwork.ie