

SDSS Scene

Visit by HIV patients a real eye-opener

JONI BRUNTON
Correspondent

The gymnasium slowly hushed as the two young people entered. They looked healthy, 'normal' enough, but everyone in the gym knew.

These kids had Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (AIDS.)

The two young adults, Richard and Debbie, had come to talk to Stouffville District Secondary School students about their personal experiences with the disease.

Debbie is 20, Richard is 24. They've both been infected with HIV - the virus believed to cause AIDS - since they were in their teens.

Debbie is from an organization called Toronto People with AIDS Foundation. She is their community outreach coordinator.

Debbie contracted AIDS at 16 from her boyfriend of two years. He has since died.

Richard is from Positive Youth Outreach. He is the one and only staff member of the organization at the moment and contracted AIDS through heterosexual intercourse in his late teens.

Richard's partner has also died.

Both organizations represented by Debbie and Richard work to provide social, economical and emotional support programs for people living with HIV and full-blown AIDS.

They also travel to schools to talk about personal experiences and to inform students.

According to the latest statistics provided through the York Regional Health Department, Canada has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the industrialized world, (HIV is the virus associated with AIDS.) It is estimated that 50,000 Canadians are now infected with HIV.

In 1992 the World Health Organization estimated that between nine and 11 million individuals worldwide were infected with HIV and of these, about one million were children.

This is not an inevitable disease. It cannot be cured as yet, but it can be prevented.

As Richard said, "Abstinence is the only completely safe choice. If you're going to have sex, have safer sex and know your partner."

Debbie made the point of saying that it was "everyone's responsibility to have safer sex."

Both are true. This presentation brought home the need for education about issues like

AIDS and other issues that will be a large part of the next generation's future.

As Madonna put it: "In this case, ignorance is not bliss." (In This Life, Madonna, 1992 Sire Records Co.)



Hydro in town

Ken Russell, a farm property owner discusses the possible location of power transmission stations in Whitchurch-Stouffville with Hydro rep Enza Cancilla recently/

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Liam McCann of Markham was injured in 1988 by a car accident. "I had a motor vehicle accident that contributed to my early retirement. I was seen by a number of doctors, physiotherapists, a chiropractor, who did their best. I improved but the problem never fully resolved," said McCann.

"I was then referred to MaxAbilitation. The results have been remarkable," stated McCann.

MaxAbilitation is made up of "a caring multidisciplinary team of health professionals dedicated to providing exceptional rehabilitation - empowering the individual to maximal wellness" - a promise that is written right into the mission statement.

This common vision of wellness is shared by all four doctors who are the principals of MaxAbilitation: Gordon Lawson, a chiropractor with expertise in nutrition and rehabilitation; Gordon Ko, a physiatrist specializing in internal medicine and rehabilitation; Susan Gillis-Lawson, a chiropractor and acupuncturist; and Annie Hum, a family physician.

The team also includes a number of other specialists including physiotherapists, massage therapists, kinesiologists, a neuro-psychologist, a psychotherapist, an occupational therapist and other specialists as needed. Amazingly, these professionals can communicate in a total of 9 languages collectively.

The most common benefactor from MaxAbilitation is the motor vehicle accident victim. Unbeknownst to many, rehabilitation is fully covered by the insurance company, whose responsibility is to return the victim to pre-accident condition.

The exciting thing about MaxAbilitation, said Dr. Gillis-Lawson, is that many patients actually end up in better condition - both mentally and physically - than ever before.

Although the Max team does all aspects of passive care, where the patient has treatment of their problem, the ultimate goal is to have the patient active and responsible for their care.

The goal of MaxAbilitation is to "empower" the patient to take an active role in their quest for total wellness. Rather than focussing solely on the part of the anatomy that hurts, these health professionals look at the whole picture, teaching the patient how to achieve optimum health through good nutrition, stress coping techniques and by creating a habit of exercise - a process that generally takes three months to accomplish.

Aquatherapy at the Markham Centennial Centre and Variety Village is supplemented by stretching, strengthening and toning exercises in the gym, supervised by MaxAbilitation professionals who are fully briefed on each patient's case. Every Friday the MaxAbilitation team meets

to discuss the progress of each patient, modifying the program "to achieve the best results in the shortest time possible", said Dr. Gillis-Lawson.

Integral to the program is a new product on the market, the Aquajogger water exercise buoyancy belt which suspends a person upright in the water, allowing him/her to run without impact on the joints. Because of the water resistance, the effectiveness of the work-out is enhanced, making 30 minutes of exercise in the water equal to 40 minutes on land. You don't even have to swim!

"People end up functioning better than they ever were, and afterwards, we find they're on a steady incline," said Dr. Gillis-Lawson. "As they get older, people tend to accept declining health, but we've found you can really turn that around."

The program has been so successful, an alumni group is being formed, Dr. Gillis-Lawson added, for all those graduates of the program who keep coming back because they love it.

McCann stated that "I'd recommend MaxAbilitation to everyone. If you're not functioning at a level you'd like to, the Max team can improve health, not just treat the disease."

MaxAbilitation is available at Markham Centennial Community Centre as well as Variety Village. For more information, call 759-1696.



Vicki Misclagna, B.A. in Ph. Ed., demonstrates the proper stroke when using the Aquajogger buoyancy belt to a patient at the Markham Centennial Centre.

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