



Lee Strausberg, AASN

# To Your Health

## National Conference Recognizes Gay Stepfamilies Challenges

The National Conference of Stepfamilies recently announced that same-sex partnered stepfamilies face high challenges. At their recent first-of-its-kind national conference they reported that fear of losing custody of children, coping with prejudices and children struggling to explain the family structure to others were the most difficult aspects.

## Government Grants \$10.2 Million for Uninsured

The Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$23.8 million to twenty states so that they may develop plans for providing uninsured residents with affordable health insurance. States included are AZ, AR, CA, CO, DE, IA, ID, IL, KS, MA, MN, NH, OR, SD, TX, UT, VT, WA, WI.

## Smoking / Youthful Beauty Don't Mix.

As if I haven't harassed you about your smoking enough... now they've found that molecules in smoke activate a gene called MMP-1. This gene tells cells to break down collagen. Collagen is what makes up the structure under your skin. Destroy the structure and you get wrinkles and sagging skin. Exposure to sunlight also activates MMP-1. If your idea of fun this summer involves laying on a beach and smoking a pack or two you should bring the wrinkle

cream and schedule that face lift for early fall. You might find it easier to stop smoking and use a sunscreen. The choice is yours.

## Closer to Preventing Cervical and Anal Cancer

John's Hopkin's University in Baltimore just announced they are close to an effective vaccine against Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Cervical Cancer in women and Anal Cancer in Gay Men are thought to be caused by HPV infection. Volunteers that received the vaccine later showed 40 times the blood levels of antibodies than are found in women actually infected with HPV. A simple, painless pap smear can detect cells before they become cancerous and allow a complete cure. A cervical pap smear for women and an anal pap smear for gay men is recommended every three years. Anyone HIV+ should receive a pap smear yearly, as they are twice as likely to develop problems. If you are not comfortable asking your current doctor to perform the test you can find an LGBT or LGBT friendly physician at [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org). See my article about anal cancer in the April Issue of HERO magazine.

## Sudden Cardiac Deaths in Women

Sudden Cardiac Deaths (SCD) in young people rose 10% between 1989 and 1996, but SCD in young women rose 30% during the same time period. "Adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle that includes 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week, a low-fat diet with lots of fruits

and vegetables, and either stopping smoking or not starting, are three steps we all can take to help reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death," said George A. Mensah, M.D., chief of cardiovascular health at CDC and co-author of the report. "Families with a history of early heart disease or sudden cardiac death should talk to their doctors about screening younger family members."

## Cancer Drug May Also Help Heart Disease

The American Cancer Society announced that Tamoxifen, now used to treat breast cancer and to prevent breast cancer in high-risk patients, might also work to keep hearts healthy. The cholesterol lowering properties of Tamoxifen have long been known, but this study now shows that it may provide other benefits for the heart. More research is currently underway.

## Smoking and Breast Reconstruction Don't Mix

Smokers that undergo breast reconstruction are forced to deal with a higher complication rate than non-smokers and ex-smokers. Researchers at the Cleveland Clinic reported that this higher rate of complications was the same regardless of what type of reconstruction was performed. Chemicals in smoke cause blood vessels to constrict which reduces blood flow to critical areas when it's most needed. Three weeks of no smoking should be observed before reconstructive surgery followed with no smoking until completely healed. The same

should hold true for other surgeries. Research continues.

## Prostate Cancer Treatments Have Different Side Effects

A study recently found that radiation and surgery were equal in their success rates but differed greatly in their side effects. According to Dr. Joanna B. Madalinska, of Erasmus University in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, about 39% to 49% of men who had surgery experienced urinary incontinence, and 80% to 91% had erectile dysfunction. In men who had radiation treatment, 6% to 7% had urinary incontinence and 41% to 55% had erectile dysfunction, according to the report. Bowel problems affected 30% to 35% of the men who had radiation therapy compared with 6% to 7% of patients who had their prostates surgically removed, the findings indicate.

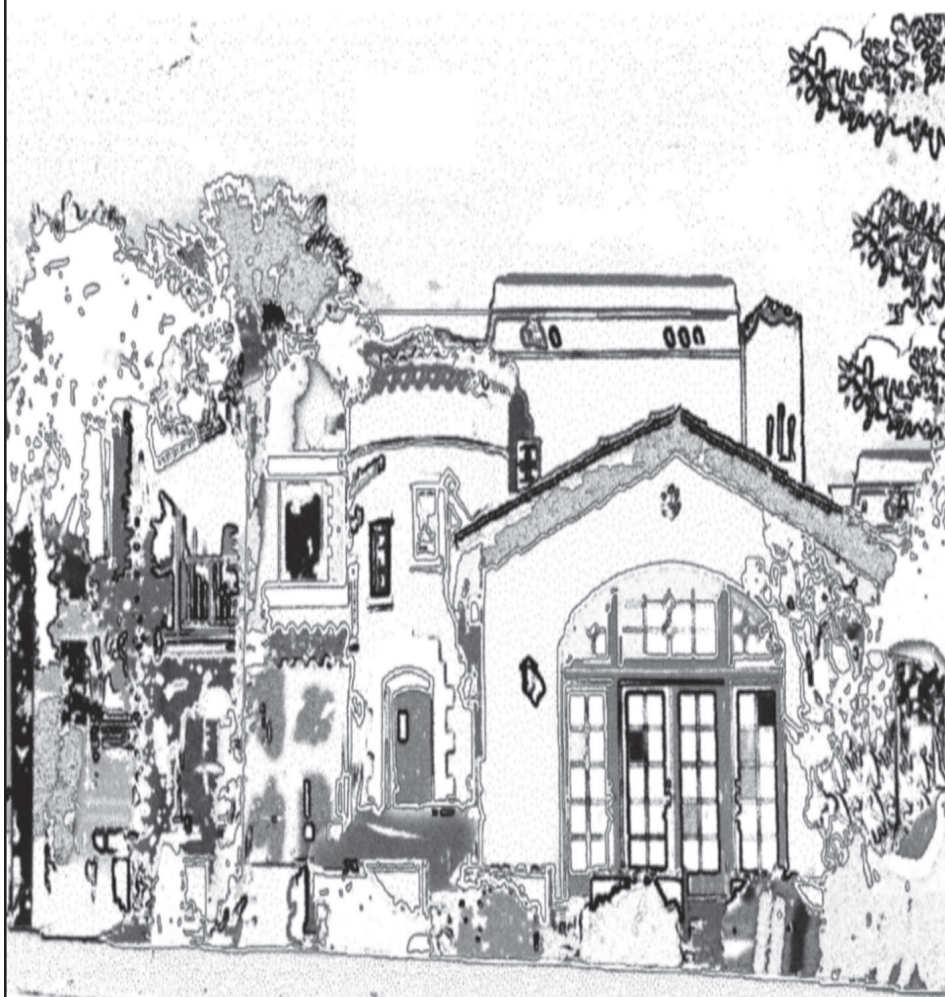
If you are faced with deciding on a treatment for Prostate Cancer be sure to discuss these outcomes with your doctor or nurse so that you can make the best choice for you.

**Important Upcoming Dates for LGBT Medicine: National Lesbian Health Conference, San Francisco, June 22-23, 2001. LGBT Medical Conference, New Orleans, September 29 .October 1, 2001 For more info on either go to [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org).**

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