

# **Educating People about AIDS: Review of *Fighting AIDS: A Handbook for Community Groups***

by National Progressive Primary Health Care Network

## ***Critical Health***

The value of education programmes in combating the spread of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection is not often appreciated. This is underlined by the initiative homosexual people took, particularly in the United States, to introduce the concept of and programmes around safer sex. The consequence of this has been a decrease in the spread of the virus among homosexuals since the 1980s.

The short-term potential of educating and changing the sexual behaviour of heterosexual people, by contrast, seems limited. Widespread success is constrained by strong religious and societal taboos and myths about sex and disease. In less developed countries it is additionally constrained by poverty and limited facilities for counselling or propagating the use of condoms. In this context, educating people about HIV and the need for safer sex as a preventative measure against the spread of the virus, requires a sensitive approach to overcoming people's myths and prejudices regarding HIV and who can be infected by it. It also requires an understanding of the societal conditions (for example, poverty, limited health services) which contribute to the spreading of the disease.

In an accessible and entertaining way, this is the approach adopted by the National AIDS Programme of the NPPHCN in its publication *Fighting AIDS*. The publication is designed to facilitate group discussion and workshops in communities, although its use of cartoons followed by simple text to elaborate and explain issues raised by the cartoon characters facilitates accessibility to individual readers. In this way *Fighting AIDS* might be a very useful guide to parents and teachers of young children as well.

The publication starts from a fairly thorough analysis of what HIV and subsequently Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) are, the various ways in which they are spread. It also explains the meaning of safe and unsafe sex. This is followed by a discussion on treatment and people coping with the potential of themselves or their loved ones having HIV or AIDS. Suggestions are made as to the support members of the community can give to HIV or AIDS sufferers. Such involvement in supportive work is suggested as a way for people to overcome myths about how the disease is spread. The last section makes valuable suggestions

about how various communities, church and political groups could educate their peers or followers about HIV and how to prevent it. The back page contains a glossary of some of the terms used in the text.

The writers are cautious to defend the reader's right to choose their sexual practices freely and to have sex as much as they want and with as many people as they want. The point is not to extol chastity (though abstinence from sex is seen as a reasonable choice) but to promote safer sex.

*Critical Health*

Fighting AIDS: A Handbook for Community Groups  
*is published by the NPPHCN, October 1992*

**More information about this publication and about HIV and AIDS is obtainable from:**

- **PPHCN National Aids programme**  
**(011) 337 7126/7**
- **The Community Aids Information Support Centre (Johannesburg City Health)**  
**(011) 725 6710**
- **Aids Counselling Line (Lifeline):**  
**0800 - 012322 (toll free)**