

**In forthcoming issues:**

- Sexual health promotion toolkit
- The condom debate—continuing controversy?
- Treatment updates digest—ongoing



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## **New Sexual Health Advice and Support Service for Gay Men in Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow**

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### **The new service**

The EHH Gay Men's Project is offering a new service to gay and bisexual men in the area. The service is designed to complement existing local sexual health advice services offered by Sexual Health Clinics by operating from a 'peer education' perspective, run by gay men for gay men. Both workers on the service are trained and experienced health promotion specialists with backgrounds in direct contact work with gay & bisexual men.

The service aims to provide a space for clients to explore and discuss sexual health issues with another man that has had similar experiences. It aims to provide the opportunity to learn new skills, or develop existing skills to enable clients to change any aspect of their sexual lives in a supportive environment. The service offers up to a maximum of six sessions for each client.

There are two workers attached to the project, one of whom has lived with HIV since 1990. Both staff can be contacted on a freephone number. They can also be contacted by email to make appointments or to ask simple questions which require only a factual answer, but any deeper concerns would have to be addressed either by telephone or in person at an appointment.

This a self-referral service, but recommendations are also welcomed. It is being advertised in London's free weekly gay listings magazines, Positive Nation, and in local gay venues using posters and postcards. We will also provide local service providers and GP surgeries with stocks of the promotional materials to pass onto potential clients.

The service is normally staffed from Monday to Friday between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm. Outside these hours, or in exceptional circumstances during them, a 24 hour answerphone is available

and a message can be left.

Appointments can be made for any time during the operating hours of the service and also on Tuesday evenings up to 8:00pm. Appointments last for 45 minutes.

To contact the service please call **0800 587 8302** or use one of the following e-mail addresses: **cash@dial.pipex.com** or **cashpositive@dial.pipex.com**

(please note that 0800 numbers are not free when calling from a mobile)

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## **How, who, where**

The service works with clients using proven cognitive behavioural therapy techniques designed to help men change sexual behaviours that they are not happy with. This is in line with the ethos of the EHH Gay Men's Project's approach to health promotion work, which is explained briefly over the page. The Project also uses the transtheoretical model of behaviour change proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1994) to ensure that all work is assessed from the same perspective.

The service is based at EHH GMP Offices at West London Centre for Counselling in Shepherd's Bush. The intended client group is gay and bisexual men who have questions about sex, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, or those who are unhappy with their sex lives as they are and want to change that. We will provide onward referral information such as Sexual Health Clinic details, psychosexual service details, and counselling services.

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## **Confidentiality**

Any personal information supplied to us will not be shared with any other organisation, subject to existing multi-agency child protection requirements, however anonymised information will be used for monitoring purposes. All records are kept securely, either under lock and key or password protected and are subject to Data Protection Act requirements.

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## **The 'Harm Reduction' approach to Health Promotion**

The EHH Gay Men's Project takes a harm reduction approach to its work. Harm reduction is an approach to health promotion that centres on the client and what is important to him. Instead of telling him what to do (or what not to do), this approach takes account of the meaning or value to the client of the behaviour under discussion – in other words the approach recognises that the behaviour in question may be something

that the client gets something positive from, but nevertheless wants to change because he knows that it may be harmful to him in the longer term.

In practical terms, this means that we work with clients using a series of exercises taken from an established and well reviewed cognitive-behavioural therapy intervention that was specifically developed for use with gay men in the area of their sexual risk taking. Among the exercises is a 'lifestyle balance' sheet which asks clients to estimate how much of their time and energy they put into the various aspects of their lives. The purpose is to ascertain if the client feels that the behaviour he is seeking to change is getting a disproportionate amount of his time. Another useful exercise is the 'decision balance' sheet. This is used to ask the client to consider both the short and long term impact of achieving the goal he has set himself, and alternatively the short and long term impacts of not achieving it. This helps the client to be clear about his level of motivation to change. We also use exercises that look at patterns of thinking, the justifications that are used to support the behaviour, and how these can be countered.

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### **The EHH Gay Men's Project...**

...is part of the Public Health and Health Improvement Unit within the Chief Executive's Directorate of Hounslow Council and is funded by the three local Primary Care Trusts in Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham. The project fully supports the values of Making It Count, the national framework for gay men's HIV prevention work. The project recognises its responsibilities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity as well as its duties under the Human Rights Act (1998). It specifically recognises its duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

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For further information on Professional Briefings from the EHH Gay Men's Project, contact:

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**PLEASE PHOTOCOPY AND PASS ON AS NECESSARY**