

AIDS Truth member criticizes AIDS denialists

In an article by Pat Sherman in the San Diego Gay & Lesbian Times (June 2007), AIDStruth.org member Dr. John Moore made the following comments about AIDS denialists in general and renegade scientist Peter Duesberg in particular.

"[The AIDS dissident movement] basically says that every scientist, every physician and every clinician out of the hundreds of thousands of professionals working worldwide on this is either some kind of malicious scumbag who will do anything for money, or we're all stupid," said AIDS researcher John P. Moore, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Cornell University.

"The reason we take these people on is because they kill people," Moore said. "If you persuade someone that HIV is harmless and then that person engages in unsafe sex or doesn't take effective therapies, you're killing that person. We didn't want to see any resurgence of this nonsense in the mainstream American media."

Moore attributed Duesberg's statement {concerning HIV virology} to "pure ignorance." "It just demonstrates he doesn't read or understand HIV literature," Moore said. "It's just a silly statement based on how he thinks a virus should behave. He has no ... right to claim that he knows everything about how every virus interacts with every human or animal immune system.... Where is the law of virology that says a virus can only interact with an organism in one particular way? ... It's like saying that all mammals are the same or all plants are the same. They're not."

Moore explained that the symptoms of AIDS in Africa are consistent with existing diseases because of the way AIDS works. "What the individual with a damaged immune system suffers from depends on the prevalent infections that are around at the time and the place that he or she lives – opportunistic infections that generally won't kill people," Moore said. "In Africa, a very common cause of death from AIDS is tuberculosis infection because it's far more prevalent in Africa than it is in Europe and North America, and many of the people who die in Africa now die of the multi-drug resistant forms of tuberculosis."

Moore said the search for a vaccine is complex. "It's an extraordinarily difficult scientific problem that is defeating the finest scientists working in the field. It's because HIV is different than other viruses that interact with the human organism in much simpler ways.... If it were as easy to deal with as yellow fever virus or poliovirus it would have been done years ago....

"HIV is a member of the lentivirus family of retroviruses," Moore said. "It's been very difficult to make vaccines in animals against other lentiviruses with similar properties."

(A)nother reason it has been so difficult to produce a vaccine, Moore believes, is the "incredible variation in the HIV genome." "It's a very, very variable virus because it mutates so rapidly," Moore said.

AIDStruth.org commends the UCSD Antiviral Research Center for making the following comment in the same article:

"A number of investigators at UCSD Medical Center ... [and] School of Medicine all agree that knowledgeable people no longer engage in debate with HIV deniers because of the

overwhelming scientific evidence that HIV causes AIDS and the lack of willingness of these HIV deniers to accept this overwhelming evidence.”

AIDStruth.org also praises an unnamed AIDS researcher in San Diego for saying

“I can totally understand how someone would want to deny the presence of this horrible thing, especially if someone had it. Denial is a basic, human psychological protective mechanism. However, you can’t usually reason somebody out of denial, ever – and the more exposure they get and the more people put it up as a legitimate theory, the more play it gets and the more harm it does in the community.”

AIDStruth.org notes that the writer of the article placed a quote from Dr. Davey Smith of UCSD out of the context in which it was made, in an attempt to create the impression that there are disagreements among AIDS scientists on the difficulties of making an HIV vaccine. Dr. Smith’s comments are accurate in context and he is commended for making them.

“I don’t think there’s really much difference between the virus that is circulating now and the virus that was circulating 20 years ago.”

Finding a vaccine has been difficult, Smith said, because of the way the virus works itself into DNA. “Once it gets into the bloodstream and it integrates into the person’s own DNA, it lives there ... and we can’t get it out,” Smith said. “Even though we can start someone on therapy and we can keep the virus from producing copies of itself, we can’t get it out of the DNA form. Once we stop the therapy, it just makes more copies of itself.”

AIDStruth.org also records here Duesberg's characteristically bizarre comment on human sexuality made in the same article. This comment is consistent with his track record (see: [Peter Duesberg and homophobia](#)).

When questioned as to why AIDS, if not caused by a virus spread through anal intercourse, was first only found in gay men Duesberg’s answer hinted more at his alleged conservative views than any solid ideas about science. “You don’t see it in the entire gay population,” he said. “You’re looking at a very small minority of the gay population who come to San Francisco or New York from the Midwest and so forth and they try to make it there as gay guys. There’s peer pressure among them to have 20 or 30 dates in a weekend and wear a leather jacket – God knows what it is.” In order to have this much sex, Duesberg contends, gay men acquired a ravenous appetite for toxic drugs. “Heterosexuals tend to get married or tend to go steady, so then the fun is over in this regard,” Duesberg said.

AIDStruth.org commends the wisdom of University of California, Berkeley, faculty members for protecting the local students from pseudoscience.

“Since I questioned HIV/AIDS, I’m only teaching the lab course,” he (Duesberg) said. “I haven’t had a graduate student in 15 years. “Some of [the students], under the condition of anonymity, tell me that this is what they were told. ‘You spent a lot of time and paid a high price to get into Berkeley. Duesberg is not the way to go.... This will kill your career.’ They have done a fairly good job excommunicating me.”

Finally, AIDS Truth observes with regret that Duesberg is far from alone among the AIDS denialists in having eccentric views on human sexuality. The writer of the San Diego Gay & Lesbian Times article extensively quoted former Virginia Tech professor and HIV/AIDS denialist Henry Bauer. It is curious that a newspaper written for the gay and lesbian community would promote the views of an individual who, in the past, has unashamedly acknowledged his bigotry in print, as outlined below:

Although presented in the Gay and Lesbian Times article as an authority on HIV and AIDS, Henry Bauer has no claim to expert status. Bauer claims that he served as a post-doctoral researcher or faculty member at several universities before moving in the late 1970s to Virginia Tech, where he established a social studies center for "Science in Society." It is not clear to us when Henry Bauer was last involved with scientific research; his publication record does not provide any evidence that he has ever conducted experimental or otherwise relevant research on HIV/AIDS. Bauer has, however, spent significant time and energy during the last four decades searching for the Loch Ness Monster, as he details on his website. He has also edited the pseudoscientific Journal of Scientific Exploration and attended meetings of the Society for Scientific Exploration, where he has presented his bizarre version of HIV/AIDS epidemiology alongside talks on crop circles, "aether physics," "Challenges to the Second Law of Thermodynamics" and "bioenergy healing."

Until recently, Henry Bauer, unlike some denialists, has made no attempt to conceal or retract his offensive, bilious social views (see endnote). In the late 1980's, Bauer wrote a book called "To Rise Above Principle: The Memoirs of an Unreconstructed Dean," under the pseudonym, "Josef Martin." In these memoirs, Bauer relays anecdotes from his time as a dean at Virginia Tech. The entire [text](#) is found (and promoted) on Bauer's own website, where the file was available at the time of this writing, mid-June, 2007.

In Bauer's otherwise unremarkable book, a passage from Chapter 11 stands out (in addition to numerous apparently misogynistic comments). Bauer recounts his horror upon learning that, as dean, he had inadvertently volunteered to appear at an event sponsored by a gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group. Bauer's following credo on the topic bears quoting in its entirety.

"I have rather old-fashioned views: I regard homosexuality as an aberration or illness, not as an "equally valid life-style" or whatever the current euphemism may be. As with many aberrations and illnesses, I do not necessarily hold the individual responsible for being ill, and I do not believe that illness is criminal. Again as with many illnesses, I believe that some mixture of genetic or hereditary predisposition combines with environmental exposure to produce the actual condition: I suspect that some people are fated essentially from birth (or even before) to have homosexual inclinations, that others are molded strongly in that direction through early up-bringing, and that some others practice homosexuality almost purely as a matter of choice (in prison or in the armed services, for example). I also believe that life offers to homosexuals certain difficulties in addition to those life offers the rest of us, and therefore---if for no other reason---any given individual is better off being heterosexual than homosexual; I believe, too, that anyone who has a choice in the matter had better opt for heterosexuality. I worry that the opposite choice may be made by a larger number than otherwise, if they are exposed at a crucial time or age to articulate, well-meaning, nice gays who push the view that theirs is a completely viable and legitimate and truly "alternative" life-style. Thus I am not entirely in sympathy with gay student alliances, gay awareness festivals, or public forums to explain the validity of the gay life-style. I don't approve of proselytizing by gays; and I think it's very difficult to draw a line between free speech about civil rights for gays and the tendency for the life-style to be

presented as something that it would be perfectly all right for anyone to choose." (pp. 80-81).

One wonders why an institution as respected as Virginia Tech has maintained its association with such a bigot over the years; the students deserve better.

AIDS Denialists are no friends of the gay community. There is no "balance" to be achieved by taking them seriously in such an article; science can never be balanced by pseudoscience, tolerance has no ethical counterpart in bigotry. The readers of Pat Sherman's article should make their views known to the newspaper's editor.

Endnote:

On June 14, 2007, within a day of the AIDS Truth posting that exposed Bauer's homophobia to a wide audience, Bauer responded on his own website by issuing a statement admitting that he was "wrong" to have been homophobic for so many years. According to Bauer, he had acknowledged this once before, in a sentence buried in the endnotes to a book review printed in the next-to-last available issue of the "Journal of Scientific Exploration", a magazine that focuses on the promotion of pseudoscience. Unfortunately, Bauer did not consider this professed change of heart sufficiently important to remove his homophobic statements from his website or even to comment on them prominently until AIDS Truth shone a light under the rock by calling attention to them. AIDS Truth now looks forward to Bauer's further introspection on his other fundamental mistakes that would lead to his admitting the folly of his scientifically unsound views on HIV/AIDS. Considering the many lives adversely affected by AIDS denialism, we suggest that such an intellectual exercise would be a rather more important task than Dr. Bauer's continuing search for the Loch Ness Monster.