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Crystal Ball #1

1985-2002

Crystal Ball

NEW QUESTIONS

Mary P. Rowe

C. Ball  
1986-87?

One of the major purposes of an ombudsman office is to get information back to line management in ways consonant with the confidentiality of individual visitors. This "upward feedback" function often serves as an Early Warning System for top management. Any ombudsperson who feels she or he has hold of a New Problem should (please) write it up for this column, especially if you ~~have~~ good solutions, but even if you don't.

My new topic is fear of AIDS. Obviously the medical aspects of AIDS are the province of your medical staff or consultants. But fear, of AIDS is a growing human resource problem. Two years ago I had no calls on this subject. Last year I got about one call a month from outside and twice as many inside. For this reason there will be a legal/ombuds/medical information panel at St. Louis, on handling complaints arising from fear of AIDS.

In the meantime, here are some preliminary suggestions for our profession. You can get up-to-date medical and epidemiological information from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. You may wish to review your company policies and relevant state laws on:

- privacy
- right to know
- discrimination.

You may wish to get together with your medical, legal and Human

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Resource colleagues to review the subject and any concerns raised to date. In our case, we have formed an internal Working Group on this subject.

You will find the general picture roughly as follows. The AIDS virus is apparently very fragile and not known to have been transmitted in any way common to the normal work environment (sneezing, using cups and computers, etc.) But possibly 1/4 or 1/2 of one percent of your work force may carry the antibodies and this fraction may double within a year. What this means is unknown. Antibody carriers may be immune or a small fraction may develop AIDS or the lesser AIDS-associated-complex symptoms (ARC). In addition, you will have (or have had) a few AIDS and ARC victims. So my early suggestion is that this is a good subject to check out soon with your company colleagues. And feel free to call if I can help talk over the issues.



Department of Distinctive Collections  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
77 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139-4307

[libraries.mit.edu](http://libraries.mit.edu)



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