

Too Little Too Late

It is just over three years since I met and buddied a person with Aids. By now you should have had the government's new Aids leaflet. Three years and 600 cases later everyone is being informed about Aids. But in these days of 'value for money', is the campaign itself useful, and being effectively co-ordinated? There are doubts.

Aids is forcing us to re-evaluate our lives, yet right now we are seeing a weak government campaign: one that increases fear, but does little to inform. In a bid to co-ordinate existing Aids education and publicity, and to bring all future projects under its own control, the government is dismantling the independent charity, the Health Education Council, and replacing it with a new body, the Health Education Authority, to be integrated into the NHS.

A body that draws upon the resources and experience of the NHS is to be welcomed, if indeed those resources and experiences are used fully and funded properly. An extra £10m has been promised by the government, doubling the Health Education Council's budget. But it is doubtful if this can support the present work of the council, as well as the new demands of the Aids crisis.

To date it seems that the government has not even heeded the advice of its own special Aids committee. The Health Education Authority may suffer the same fate. The fear of those working in the field is that the vast medical and counselling skills of the NHS, Terrence Higgins Trust and Body Positive, will be ignored.

It is hoped that by April 1 the new body will have been formed, and clear goals set. However, even when it is running, the Health Education Authority, being a government body, is unlikely to have the structures to react quickly and effectively at different turns of the crisis. •

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