

of taking positive steps to stop its spread. Given the financial and time constraints under which the Health Department was working, the most effective method of increasing awareness of Aids during the nominated week was to focus the campaign on the group most at risk, the sexually active population. For this reason *First Aids* was seen as an ideal programming choice. A lot of time was spent discussing condoms—embarrassment about buying and using them, their new image, and “designer condoms”. The demonstration by experts on how to put on a condom, using a finger as a model, was not regarded as being distasteful and it conveyed a very important piece of information on the prevention of Aids, said the Corporation. The Board considered that there had been no lack of good taste in the programme’s presentation.

With regard to partiality and bias, the Corporation said the programme did not ignore the reliability factor in relation to condoms: the presenter said “they don’t make it absolutely safe”, the Corporation wrote. On the question of the safety of condoms in preventing Aids, the programme was at pains to ensure that the contraceptive devices were properly used, and went to the extent of including a demonstration. It was also noted that the programme did not give a clear message that promiscuous sex was the accepted norm, although it appeared to apply to some of the young audience in the discussion. It did not follow that all young adults were promiscuous and the presenter made it clear that total celibacy was becoming fashionable in some quarters and that young women who had steady relationships were encouraging other girls to follow suit. There were also further references to the desirability of staying with one person and that “you will learn more from one person because it becomes open and honest”.

The Board of the Corporation recognised the subject was a controversial one but it was balanced with the inclusion of medical and other influential participants on the panel.

The complaint was not upheld by the Corporation.

Written Submission to the Tribunal

In a submission to the Tribunal, the Corporation added that the programme was unquestionably a public service programme. The style was deliberately devised to attract and hold the attention of a young audience. It was not aimed at those who are chaste, who are not endangered: it was directed to those who were sexually active, who were more at risk of contracting Aids. The audience was a picked one and many of its members apparently sexually active or questions would not have been put to them in the way they were. The message of the programme for its intended television audience was that, if young people would have sex, it should be as safe as possible. References in the programme were consistently to “safer sex” not to “safe sex”. In the context of the programme, the reference was to sex using a condom as being safer than sex without it.

Condoms provided the best protection for those who were sexually active. If the failings of the devices had been dwelt on, some may have been led to question that use. That would have undermined the message, although it was said that they did not make intercourse absolutely safe. The programme demonstrated that Aids could be contracted and not become apparent for some years. It might be contracted before marriage by the sexually active; marriage was not necessarily a defence. While the complainant’s claim that the majority of Aids victims were homosexuals could be literally true, an authority had said that there were more infected heterosexuals than homosexuals.

The whole purpose of the programme was to encourage those young people who would persist in being sexually active to take the best available measure to guard against infection and the transmission of Aids.

In reply to the Corporation’s submission, the complainant said that the prior warning was not an answer. If the programme

was not intended for children, it should not have been shown in peak viewing time. The programme should have been broadcast at 10 p.m. followed by a balancing programme which told the true facts, namely, that in western countries the most at-risk groups were homosexuals, bi-sexuals and intravenous drug users. If the BCNZ did not wish to balance the *First Aids* programme by inviting Women for Life to make a programme which highlighted saying no to pre-marital sex and the advantage of keeping sex for marriage, there was an English video available. It was from the British Family and Youth Concern, produced for 14 to 16 year olds, on the wider moral and social implications of Aids and would provide the balance lacking. It was only 12 minutes long.

The medical panel was not balanced nor was the audience. Only one girl in the audience clearly advocated no sex out of marriage. In ordinary life, more girls were living wholesome lives than promiscuous ones. The imbalance in the audience gave the impression that promiscuity was the norm and the only hope was condom usage. The failure rate of condoms was not emphasised. Primarily, the best way to teach young people to protect themselves from Aids was the teaching of an ethical approach.

Hearing

The Tribunal convened a hearing at which evidence was given for the complainant by Patricia Bartlett, Dr Mary English, the Rev. Gordon Dempsey and for the Corporation by Dr John Stephenson.

Many of the points already made by both parties were reiterated in the evidence. Miss Bartlett pointed out that many children may never have seen a condom but it was treated as a joke on the programme. The programme encouraged promiscuity by suggesting that condoms could provide safe sex.

Dr Mary English, a medical practitioner of Lyall Bay, said that the Aids prevention campaign was a controversial issue both in the way it was done and in the degree of emphasis. It was not just a medical question.

Some of the issues which she said could be addressed were young promiscuous heterosexuals; the best advice; condoms as frontline protection; the withholding of information; and celibacy.

She said that the incidence of the spread of Aids by heterosexual contact, even from people at high risk, was low. She pointed out that there was a significant failure rate with condoms and people needed to have all the facts, including the failure rate, so that they could make a decision to go ahead and take the risk or not go ahead.

The major emphasis should have been on self-control.

The programme should have aimed at the groups which were at risk.

The programme showed a skewed and selective viewpoint.

The Rev. G. J. Dempsey, a Lower Hutt clergyman, did not accept that financial and time constraints justified the use of the imported *First Aids* programme. He could not see why half an hour had not been given to get differing views and opinions. Everyone on the panel (except 2 doctors) expressed a predilection to pre-marital sex which made the programme unbalanced.

The programme should have gone beyond “technology” to the behaviour level and this only occurred once when gay contacts were mentioned. Mr Dempsey accepted that “technology” had reduced infection rates and that for some the technological solution was the only one.

The whole case for chastity had not been put and there were sniggers at that concept. The case for chastity, propriety, love and self-control which dictate human behaviour was not put. There was trivialisation of pre-marital sex. Promiscuity was the message.