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## Alarming Number of HIV-Positive Gay Men Sought Infection, Says Health Official

by Linda Ames Nicolosi

The Director of Behavioral Health Services for San Francisco County, Dr. Robert Cabaj, has told *Rolling Stone* magazine that about one-quarter of newly infected gay men may have actively sought out the fatal disease.

There are no hard numbers to back up his estimate, Cabaj said, but men known as "bug-chasers" are alarmingly common in the gay community—both men who consciously seek the virus, and those who are in denial about their wish to become HIV-positive.

Cabaj charged that gay organizations are actively covering up about the problem because "it's a difficult issue that dredges up some images about gay men that they don't want to have to deal with."

Some gay men say being HIV-positive "opens the door to sexual Nirvana" because they need no longer worry about safe sex, the *Rolling Stone* article noted, while others say they choose to become infected because they can't stand the idea of being different from their HIV-infected lover.

The magazine's article, entitled "In Search of Death" (February 6th) tells the story of Carlos, a man who considers HIV-transmission "the most erotic thing I can imagine."

Carlos estimates that he has already had several hundred sex partners; he eagerly awaits the day when he tests HIV-positive—at which time his erotic interest, Carlos says, will then turn toward infecting another person—which is known as "gift-giving."

"As sick as it sounds," Carlos said, "killing another man slowly" is exciting.

The thrill of unsafe sex is further heightened for Carlos by his own duplicity as a volunteer at the offices of the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), where he teaches other men how to protect themselves with condoms.

At the GMHC, an assistant director of community outreach, Daniel Castellano, admitted that "bug chasing" does exist. But Castellano told *Rolling Stone* that although he would try to "work with" a counselee who said he wanted to get infected, if that's a decision a man wants to make, he would ultimately respect that decision.

The Director of the office of HIV/AIDS at the Miami-Dade Department of Health confirmed that deliberate HIV infection is a "definite problem" in the Miami-Dade area as well.

The author of the *Rolling Stone* article, Gregory Freeman, said representatives of some gay organizations "actively dissuaded" him from writing the article.

In a follow-up to the *Rolling Stone* report, the Sunday Herald ([www.sundayherald.com](http://www.sundayherald.com)) described internet sites dedicated to bug-chasing, where "conversion parties" are celebrated, in which HIV-positive and HIV-negative men gather with the goal of having the HIV-positive men infect the others.

The *Sunday Herald* mentioned that a new film, "The Gift," would be shown at the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival in February. It features Doug Hitzel, a 21-year-old gay man from San Francisco who chose to become infected with the "gift" of HIV. Dealing with the day-to-day reality of the illness, Hitzel now says he regrets his decision. ■