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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **NEW GUIDELINES CALL FOR INCREASED TESTING**

#### ***New campaign urges gay men to 'Know Your HIV Status'***

LONDON, 3 OCTOBER – GMFA , the gay men’s health charity, have launched a new campaign outlining the benefits of knowing your HIV status, following a call for increased HIV testing from the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH). New BASHH HIV testing guidelines, released just weeks ago, recommend yearly HIV testing for gay men in a bid to reduce the thousands of undiagnosed HIV infections in the UK. Amongst gay men, around one third of those infected with HIV do not know they have the virus and so risks their own health and the chance of giving someone else the virus unknowingly.

Professor Peter Borriello, Director of the Health Protection Agency's Centre for Infections, stated, “The control of HIV transmission is a major public health challenge and testing for HIV, and for all sexually

transmitted infections in the UK, needs to be increased still further. If you care, get tested.”

“We recommend that gay men should test at least annually for HIV. Earlier diagnosis of HIV infection will give men access to treatment, improve their survival and reduce the risk of transmission to partners.”

Despite HIV being a manageable medical condition, providing the right treatment is sought, many men still avoid finding out their HIV status for sure. A recent study involving men in gay venues in London, Manchester and Brighton revealed that 30% of men in London, 28% in Brighton and 19% in Manchester who were identified as HIV-positive (using an anonymous oral swab test) did not know that they had HIV, even though they had visited a sexual health clinic within the last year. Even more strikingly, amongst men who had not been to a sexual health clinic within the previous year but were identified as having HIV, 70% in London, 55% in Brighton and 78% in Manchester did not know they were HIV-positive.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the 2005 Gay Men’s Sex Survey revealed that large numbers of gay men remain untested for HIV in the UK, with 44% of those completing the survey saying that they had never had an HIV test.

Early detection of HIV leads to better health outcomes, both through enabling better control of decisions around HIV treatment and through appropriate care for HIV-related health problems which may otherwise be missed.

Current guidelines support early medical care for people with HIV, before symptoms are seen. However, 2005 data from the HPA estimated

that 22% of gay men were diagnosed too late when health problems could arise, and 7% had already progressed to clinically defined AIDS. Late HIV diagnosis in gay men has also been shown to increase the chances of death within a year by more than ten times.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, men with undiagnosed HIV infection may contribute to onward transmission of HIV, both through incorrect assumptions of their own HIV status and through having generally higher viral loads than men who are diagnosed and on treatment.

GMFA's new advertising campaign explains the benefits of knowing if you have HIV. These include early access to treatment and care, which results in better health and longer life for men who have been infected, and having the necessary knowledge of status to take steps to avoid onward transmission. The campaign is supported by detailed information about HIV testing and the different tests available on GMFA's sex & sexual health website at [www.gmfa.org.uk/testing](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/testing).

“What makes this campaign special is that it was developed by a group of volunteers most of whom are HIV positive themselves,” said Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes for GMFA. “Getting a positive diagnosis is still really tough, but these volunteers are able to talk honestly about the benefits of knowing your status from their personal experience.

“If you don't get tested it won't make you HIV negative. Even if you don't test it's likely you'll find out eventually but it may not be until you get ill, when your immune system has been severely damaged. It's better to take control of when you find out so that you are able to access the

best medical attention and advice. We want men to understand if you take an HIV test it helps put you in control of your health, your life and your relationships.”

The campaign, which was sponsored by the Peter Moores Foundation and the Derek Butler Trust, will appear in the London and national gay press. Information about HIV testing, including where to go for a test, can be viewed at [www.gmfa.org.uk/testing](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/testing).

The launch of this campaign coincides with the launch GMFA's new SMS-based fundraising initiative which asks people to show their support for the charity's work with a £3 donation by texting 'GMFA' to 82540.

- Ends -

For more information about this or any other of GMFA's campaigns and actions, contact:

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### **Notes to editor**

#### **References:**

1. A tale of three cities: persisting high HIV prevalence, risk behaviour and undiagnosed infection in community samples of men who have sex with men. Dodds JP et al. 2007
2. Chadborn TR et al. No time to wait: how many HIV-infected homosexual men are diagnosed late and consequently die? (England and Wales, 1993-2002). AIDS 19: 513-520, 2005

#### **About GMFA:**

GMFA was established in 1992 and is the UK's leading charity dedicated to gay men's health. GMFA's mission is to improve gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives. We believe that the best health promotion for gay men comes from gay men themselves, and so we use the knowledge and ideas of our 170 volunteers (most of them gay men) to design and plan our thought provoking sexual health interventions. We have received international acclaim for our Sex and Sexual Health website ([www.gmfa.org.uk/sex](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/sex)) which was visited by a third of London's gay men in 2006. Our other websites include a detailed listing of sexual health services available for gay men in London ([www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices)), an information resource for HIV positive gay men ([www.gmfa.org.uk/positive](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/positive)) and a guide to gay sports and social groups in London ([www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide](http://www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide)). All of our sites can be accessed at [www.gmfa.org.uk](http://www.gmfa.org.uk). GMFA produce a range of advertising campaigns, leaflets, postcards and booklets. Independent surveys have concluded that our campaigns reach up to 60% of the London gay population and we are the most reliable agency at reaching gay men. In addition to this we distribute our own health magazine, FS, free to London's gay bars and clubs to further educate gay men about relationships, their bodies, general health and STIs. Over the last fourteen years we have provided courses for over 10,000 gay men, providing safer sex education, life skills and stop smoking courses. We currently provide a range of groupwork interventions across England and Wales. GMFA's has Big Lottery funding which has been used to create award winning sexual health interventions for Black gay men in London.