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PRESS RELEASE

ARE YOU A SEX CLINIC VIRGIN?

GMFA's FS magazine takes a trip to the clinic

London, 11 February 2010 – For lots of men, a trip to the GUM clinic can seem daunting, so they delay it or avoid it all together. That's what happened to Mike Robinson, gay man and sex clinic virgin. In the latest issue of FS magazine from GMFA, the gay men's health charity, he reveals how, after a long time of putting it off, he took a deep breath and headed to the GUM clinic for the first time – only to find out it wasn't such a big deal after all.

Mike explains: "The idea of it made me feel uncomfortable... Then I read an article in a magazine saying how you can have some sexually transmitted infections and not even know it, and they can cause physical and mental damage if not treated... It also said that if you do have HIV the sooner you know the better. With all this whizzing around in my head, I thought it was time to bite the bullet and go for a check-up."

Going for a sexual health check-up can be quick and simple, so it is well-worth making the effort. If you are sexually active, it is recommended you go about every six months to see if you've picked up any infections. You may have an STI without knowing it, so sexual health check-ups are an important part of staying healthy.

When you go for a check-up, most clinics now include an HIV test on an 'opt out' basis – they tell you they're doing an HIV test and you have an option to decline – rather than you asking for one yourself.

Mike adds: "There are many reasons for going to the clinic, like finding out your boyfriend has been sleeping around or a guy has given you a late Christmas 'present' you didn't want. You might have not been for a while, or never been like me... After I left I thought all that fuss was for nothing. It was quick, simple and the staff were friendly and informative."

Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes at GMFA, adds: "Mike's experience is common among gay men. Sometimes going to the clinic can seem a hassle, or we're worried about what will happen. But often it's simpler than going to a GP, a dentist, or even to get your hair cut. And it's an important part of looking after ourselves and keeping our bodies in check."

There are many walk-in clinics in London so you don't always have to make an appointment in advance. For full listings of sexual health clinics in London, and links to clinics around the UK, visit www.gmfa.org.uk/clinics. You can go to any sexual health clinic you like – it doesn't have to be the one closest to your home.

The article 'I was a sex clinic virgin' appears in issue 116 of FS magazine, the fit and sexy gay man's magazine from GMFA. FS is available for free in gay venues and GUM clinics across the UK or can be downloaded at www.gmfa.org.uk/fs.

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About GMFA

Founded in 1992, GMFA is the UK's leading charity dedicated to gay men's health. Its mission is to improve gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives. The organisation is based on the belief that the best health promotion for

gay men comes from gay men themselves. For this reason, it uses the knowledge and ideas of its 170 volunteers, most of them gay men, to design and plan its thought-provoking sexual health interventions. These include a range of advertising campaigns, leaflets, postcards and booklets; FS, its health magazine, distributed nationally in gay venues and GU clinics; and national and London-based courses covering sex education, life skills and smoking cessation. In addition, GMFA creates targeted sexual health interventions for black gay men and HIV positive gay men. Independent surveys have concluded that GMFA's campaigns reach up to 60% of the London gay population and that the organisation is the most reliable agency at reaching gay men. The charity runs a range of information websites:

- Sex & Sexual Health, www.gmfa.org.uk/sex - visited by a third of London's gay men in 2006;
- London Services, www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices - detailed listing of sexual health services for gay men in London;
- Positive Gay Guide, www.gmfa.org.uk/positive - information for HIV positive gay men;
- The Guide, www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide - a guide to gay sports and social groups in London;
- Quit smoking, www.gmfa.org.uk/quitsmoking - information and advice on quitting smoking for gay men;
- About GMFA, www.gmfa.org.uk/aboutgmfa - for more information on GMFA.

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