



Unit 43, Eurolink Centre

49 Effra Road

LONDON SW2 1BZ

020 7738 6872

matthew.hodson@gmfa.org.uk

www.gmfa.org.uk/sex

PRESS RELEASE

HAVING HIV INCREASES THE RISK OF SMOKING-RELATED ILLNESS

LONDON, 14 FEBRUARY – HIV positive gay men are more likely to suffer from a variety of smoking related illnesses than HIV negative smokers. Evidence for this has been growing over the last few years, and these increased risks often have nothing to do with a weakened immune system. Moreover, data shows that gay men are more likely to smoke than the general population, and gay men living with HIV are more likely to smoke than HIV negative or untested gay men.

Since combination therapy became available, which has extended the life expectancy of people with HIV, there has been an increase in the number of cases of 'non-AIDS defining cancers' amongst people who are living with the virus. Cancers such as lung cancer and anal cancer are now becoming much more common in people living with HIV, and one of the major risk factors for these cancers is smoking. Lung cancer is now often seen in HIV positive people with strong immune systems and under

the age of 40. Anal cancer is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which is more common and more likely to lead to anal cancer in HIV positive people. Smoking causes HPV to replicate faster, in turn increasing the risk of anal cancer developing.

Emphysema, an incurable disease causing the walls of the lungs to disintegrate normally associated with long term smokers in their 60s or 70s, is now being seen more often in younger HIV positive smokers.

The use of anti-HIV drugs causes an increased risk of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease – heart attacks and strokes – and this is due to the hardening of the arteries. Smoking has for a long time been known to also increase this risk and so HIV positive smokers are at a greater risk of these illnesses than their HIV negative counterparts.

GMFA, the gay men's health charity, is launching a new advertising campaign to inform HIV positive gay men of the increased risk to their health posed by smoking. The campaign is supported by detailed information for HIV positive smokers on GMFA's positive men's website at www.gmfa.org.uk/positive.

“The dangers of smoking are well known but fewer people are aware of the increased risks that smoking holds for people living with HIV. This campaign aims to inform HIV positive gay men of some of the new data that we have on the risks of smoking to their health,” said Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes for GMFA. “HIV treatments are working to extend the life expectancy of people living with HIV, but these can have a

health impact of their own and so it is more important than ever that those who are infected with HIV take care of themselves and their health.”

The campaign consists of a series of five adverts each highlighting a different smoking-related illness that HIV positive smokers have an increased vulnerability to. The campaign, which was sponsored by Pfizer Limited, will appear in the gay and HIV positive press and will refer men to further information on the health impacts of smoking if you have HIV on GMFA’s positive men’s website. These pages can be viewed at www.gmfa.org.uk/hivsmoking. GMFA also offers an NHS approved stop smoking course specifically for gay men, irrespective of HIV status.

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

Matthew Hodson
Day Phone Number: 020 7738 6872
Email: matthew.hodson@gmfa.org.uk

Notes to editor

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. Yearly we deliver three new mass media campaigns in the gay press to disseminate up to date information regarding HIV and STIs to the gay male community. 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. Annually, we deliver 1000 hours of group work to educate gay men in safer sex, and over the last fourteen years have provided courses for over 10,000 gay

men. We currently provide a range of groupwork interventions in London and across England and Wales. GMFA recently received Big Lottery funding to create sexual health interventions for Black gay men in London. We have received international acclaim for our Sex and Sexual Health website (www.gmfa.org.uk/sex). Our other websites include a detailed listing of sexual health services available for gay men in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices), an information resource for HIV positive gay men (www.gmfa.org.uk/positive) and a guide to gay sports and social groups in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide). All of our sites can be accessed at www.gmfa.org.uk.