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DIARY DATE

GMFA's next two stop smoking courses start:

- Thursday May 8th, 7-9pm. Continues every Thursday evening for seven weeks.
- Tuesday June 17th, 7-9pm. Continues every Tuesday evening for seven weeks.

Book a place at: www.gmfa.org.uk/stopsmoking or call 020 7738 3712

PRESS RELEASE

GMFA'S STOP SMOKING SUCCESS

GMFA's stop smoking courses achieve a higher quit rate than standard NHS courses

LONDON, 17 April 2008 – Last year GMFA's stop smoking courses achieved a 50% higher success rate than generic NHS courses. GMFA's course is specifically geared towards gay men and while NHS smoking session courses offer a 50% success rate¹, many more gay men who set a quit date with GMFA manage to stop (75%). The GMFA course is a weekly seven session course, based on an approved NHS model and adapted to reflect the specific experiences of gay men.

“While the NHS courses do a good job, sometimes its easier to speak about the times that you’re most tempted to smoke, like when you’ve just had sex, if you’re with other gay men,” said Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes for GMFA. “I smoked about 30 fags a day for 19 years. I thought I enjoyed it at the time, but I also knew it was damaging my health and wasting my money. I’d tried stopping before but always slipped back into my old bad habits when I got stressed or drunk. My colleagues persuaded me to go on the GMFA course and I stopped smoking and have stayed stopped for six years now. Being able to talking to other gay men about our reasons for smoking, and then quitting together as part of group, worked for me.”

Gay men are more likely to smoke than their straight counterparts. A staggering 41% of gay men are smokers - rising to 60 per cent for 25 to 34 year olds – way above the national average of 25 per cent.² For HIV positive gay men the story is worse still as they are more likely than other gay men to be heavy smokers, smoking 10 or more cigarettes per day.³ Gay men with HIV are also more likely to experience some smoking related illness. Cancers such as lung cancer and anal cancer are becoming more common in HIV-positive smokers compared with HIV-negative smokers.

Medical research agrees that there is need for services that address the specific needs of the gay community without prejudice or judgment.⁴ There is evidence that if healthcare professionals have little understanding of gay men’s specific health needs, or little desire to understand their social and sexual lives, the standard of care is low.⁵ This low level of care has repeatedly been linked to homophobic healthcare professionals^{6,7} and it has been estimated that homophobic attitudes exist among 20% of UK medical providers.⁸ In addition, a survey by the university of Southampton, found that over half of the respondents felt that the views of gay community are not taken into account when planning local services.⁹

“To provide a service that helps gay men to quit smoking, you need to understand the cultural, social and personal needs of gay men. I’m really thrilled that we were able to help so many gay men stop smoking last year

and I hope that even more men will be encouraged to stop this year," added Hodson.

Comments from the GMFA course evaluation:

"Doing something as part of a team gives you strength and willpower."

"Having sessions in advance of your quit date helps you prepare mentally."

"It helped to put my habit into a realistic perspective by listening to others talk about their relationship with smoking."

- ENDS -

If more information about this or any other of GMFA's campaigns and actions is required,

References:

1. Statistics on NHS Stop Smoking Services in England , April 2007 to September 2007 (Annual statistical bulletin).
2. NHS Stop smoking service: 540 men interviews with gay and bisexual men conducted anonymously by telephone by The Survey Shop between august 18th and September 8th 2006.
3. Data from the Gay Men's Sex Survey 2005 (to be published in 2007). Sigma Research
4. Makadon HJ et al. Optimizing primary care for men who have sex with men. JAMA 296: 2362 – 2365, 2006
5. Taylor I, Robertson. The health needs of Gay men – a discussion of the literature and implications for nursing. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 20(3): 560-566. 2004.
6. Malley M, Tasker F. Lesbians, Gay men and family therapy: a contradiction in terms? Journal of Family Therapy, 21(1): 3-29, 1999.
7. Bridget J (2001) Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people and health. www.lesbianinformationservice.org/healthlr.rtf
8. GLADD (2004) Dignity at work for Lesbian and Gay doctors and dentists, medical and dental students. London, The Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists. www.gladd.dircon.co.uk/PDFs/iwl_guid.pdf
9. Count Me In. key findings from 1145 questionnaires. Researched by Dale Webb and David Wright of University of Southampton. Sponsored by East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority, Brighton & Hove Regeneration Partnership, Brighton & Hove Primary Care Group, and Brighton & Hove Council. Published June 2001

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. 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. 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 has Big Lottery funding to create sexual health interventions for Black gay men in London.