New Study Finds Genetic Link to Homosexuality

By Linda Anderson

A new study has found a correlation between a specific region of the X chromosome and male homosexuality. The finding represents new evidence that sexual orientation may be influenced by heredity.

The study conducted by NIH scientists titled "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation" was reported in the July 16 issue of Science. The authors are Dr. Dean H. Hamer, Stella Hu, Dr. Victoria L. Magnuson, Dr. Nan Hu, and Dr. Angela M.L. Pattacucci.

By analyzing the inheritance of genetic markers in pairs of homosexual brothers, the scientists localized the region related to sexual orientation to a minute segment of the human genome. However, a specific gene has not yet been isolated.

Hamer, chief author of the study, said, "The region that we've discovered represents a significant variation in the human genetic repertoire. If the gene itself can be isolated, then it will be important to understand how it interacts with other genes, the brain, and the environment to influence a trait as complex and variable as human sexuality."

Hamer is with NCI and conducted the study.

Lessons on Writing About Health for Children Given

By Amy Iadarola

Helen's hair is always mussed, a big knot on the top of her head, and her dress is always buttoned wrong. But Helen's disheveled appearance doesn't concern her because she's so excited about life, so full of questions. "Why? Why? Why?" and "How?" she asks.

Many years ago, Helen was a student of Catherine O'Neill's. Then an elementary school teacher, O'Neill is now a freelance writer for the Washington Post. She conjures up Helen when she writes the "How and Why" column in the Post's Health section. The column, which was born in 1986 with the first issue of the section, is aimed at kids ages 6 to 12, kids like Helen.

O'Neill spoke at the recent NIH public affairs forum entitled "Why Do I Have a Bellybutton?: Writing About Health for Children."

Initially, O'Neill's mission in writing the column was "to answer curious kids' questions." Over the years, her mission has evolved. "I aim to help kids understand their bodies and their place in the world and to bolster their ability to control and guide their futures," she said. In her column, she has addressed issues ranging from menstruation to whether or not it's legal to own a fish.

"They were great to work with, from the nurses and doctors to the pharmacy techs and others," said Miller, a 21-year-old veteran of the 10D intensive care unit. "I really respected them. They see so much, and so many different types of cases."

Like the black widow spider bite and the patient kicked in the chest by a bull seen by Woodring, a Silver Spring native who has spent 2 years on 12 West, an oncology/AIDS unit. Or the split heads and open wounds casually reported to CC nurse Florentino "Tino" Merced-Galindez, ordinarily an oncology nurse on 12 East but for 4 weeks a volunteer at the IHS hospital in Tuba City, Ariz.

Like Miller and Woodring, he left deeply impressed by how much the nurses do with so little in the way of such common items as computers, Betadine swabs, and disposable syringes.

"They do an outstanding job," he said. "Nursing is done differently in every city in the U.S., but what is common to all is that they do the best they can with what they have."

Echoed Miller, "I think they're the basis for TQM (total quality management, a quality initiative adopted in recent years throughout the NINR, she and NINR director Dr. Ada Sue Hinshaw show the new institute logo.

After a brief ceremony where Secretary Donna Shalala (1) signed the Federal Register notice establishing the NINR, she and NINR director Dr. Ada Sue Hinshaw show the new institute logo.