

Fauci warns AIDS-TB link is one to dread

by Joyce Fredman

On March 6, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci was the honored speaker and guest at the American Chemical Society's Science Reporters' Workshop Keynote Dinner. His talk was entitled "AIDS: Considerations for the 1990s." Although informative, not much of the talk was very surprising.

In 1980, Fauci was appointed chief of the Laboratory of Immunoregulation at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). In 1984, he added the post of director of NIAID. He also serves as associate director of the National Institutes of Health for research on AIDS and as director of the NIH Office of AIDS Research. At 52, he is the youngest person to serve in that position. He is known as the "AIDS czar."

As a clinical researcher, his specialty is the pathogenesis and treatment of immune-mediated diseases. He has done pioneer work in the field of immunoregulation and is recognized internationally for delineating the mechanisms by which immuno-suppressive agents modulate the human immune response. He is now doing work in developing strategies to combat AIDS, and has been instrumental in elucidating the nature of the virus itself.

Fauci began his talk by discussing federal allocations for AIDS research. In 1982, when work was begun on AIDS, the budget was \$3 million. In 1993, it is \$1.072 billion. As large an increase as that may appear, the allocations have hit a plateau and are not nearly enough to address the magnitude of the problem. He stressed that the epidemiology and history of HIV infection is probably the most complex we have seen. It is not the most devastating (compared to the flu epidemic of 1918 or tuberculosis or measles), but the most complex as a phenomenon, shown by the 10-year period of incubation before any manifestation of the disease.

'Education' impact not in evidence

He noted that while the rate of infection of young "gay" men had gone down to 1% in the late 1980s, but it was now up to 3-4%. Quite a significant jump, given all the education. He explained that he was not a behavioral scientist; however, it seemed to him that education was not exactly doing the trick. He quickly added that all the educating the "gay" groups are doing is a fine thing, it just didn't seem to have much of an impact on the statistics, particularly among young people.

Fauci predicted that if this increase continued, particularly in the inner-city areas, more and more women would be infected, and then children. The progression is easy to fol-

low. As more inner-city minority men are infected, women's choice of partners becomes an AIDS pool. Fauci observed that it could well be the case that AIDS in the United States will end up being relegated to inner city ghettos. Therefore, it may come to pass that some will say, let them die out, a danger which economist Lyndon LaRouche warned against some years ago.

As if to underline Fauci's fears, the March 7 *New York Times* quoted Dr. Don Des Jarlais, a drug abuse specialist and AIDS researcher at Beth Israel hospital in New York, saying that the approach must be to focus on certain neighborhoods. Jarlais is an advocate of providing clean needles for users, more drug-treatment programs, and explicit sex education adapted to the language and mores of the neighborhood, who has come under fire from parents and medical colleagues alike.

Fauci estimated that there are 13 million HIV-infected and 600,000 AIDS cases worldwide. The World Health Organization projections for the year 2000 are about 50 million. But, he noted, the epidemic is raging in Asia. In a northern province in Thailand, for example, 10% of the men inducted into the army test positive. As high as these figures are, Dr. Michael Haseltine, chief of the Division of Human Retrovirology at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and professor at the Department of Pathology at Harvard Medical School, is even more pessimistic. He says that it is reasonable to expect 100 million infected by the year 2000, and in Thailand he cites infection rates of 20% in some provinces.

Fauci discussed the four drugs now used to treat patients: AZT, ddI, ddC, and interferon-alpha. He noted that if a person is sick, such treatment extends life 12-18 months, and if one is in a disease-free state, it doubles that period of time. Clearly this is not anywhere near what we want to achieve. He discussed the importance of targeted drug therapy, developing a peptide to go inside the HIV enzyme, where it can do the most damage.

Fauci stressed that tuberculosis, which can be gotten from simply a cough, is the casual contact disease we should dread. He noted that one-third of the world's population is infected with TB. Therefore, if you have an AIDS epidemic, and this overlays with TB, as it surely will, then an epidemic will ensue that could wipe out substantial numbers of people. He emphasized that for the Third World, AIDS is already a socio-economic disaster.

Despite the range of Fauci's presentation, most of his audience only asked questions about educational efforts, fundraisers, and how sensitive researchers are to the homosexual lobby's needs. This author asked whether he thought that adequate measures were being taken against TB. He replied that Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala has promised to make TB and AIDS priorities. But Shalala's office, in a phone interview, put the priority on "women's health issues." A year ago, Fauci said that authorities were too slow in getting on the track of AIDS. Will the tragedy be repeated with TB?