

Death certificates hide AIDS^{DOCTOR 5.2.87} truth

DOCTORS are concealing the true number of deaths from AIDS to protect the feelings of bereaved relatives.

Instead of recording AIDS on the death certificate, they are giving pneumonia 'or whatever comes to mind' as cause of death, according to a specialist in community medicine.

'They don't want to upset relatives, so we may not have accurate figures about how many people are dying from AIDS,' explained Dr Marvin Schweiger, Leeds'

medical officer for environmental health, who has predicted that 100,000 people in the city will be infected with AIDS by the year 2000.

He called on doctors to ask themselves whether it was morally right to give misleading information when it was so important that accurate statistics were compiled in order to plan 'sensibly' for the growing AIDS epidemic.

Dr Schweiger also questioned whether the overriding emphasis on confidentiality was obstructing the gathering of statistics

and leading to 'double standards' in the medical profession.

He said the need for confidentiality was stressed 'very vigorously' in all the DHSS guidelines on AIDS and as a result some doctors were reluctant even to record the AIDS diagnosis on hospital discharge notes.

Doctors and nurses in the community were often left in the dark, he said.

'We should have practices and policies not to spread the disease but we won't even tell our nursing colleagues in the community about diagnosis.

'I think the whole profession needs to think very hard about the consequences of not reporting the incidence of AIDS and AIDS deaths,' he added.

But he recognised the problems that arose when AIDS patients refused to allow even close relatives to know of their condition.

'Wives can be totally unaware of the diagnosis and lives can be put at risk. If the patient doesn't give permission you can't tell anyone else.'

See page 10

AIDS (pneumonia)
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Doctor
5.2.87
171