



Have you come out to your doctor lately? As a regular hospital junkie I became fed up with the questions about contraception usage and possible pregnancies about two years ago. So one fine day, sick to death of the usual hetero type queries I decided to give my doctor a few hints. He was not slow on the uptake. In fact he began to become obsessed with my love life and start-

ed asking lots of questions about what lesbians do in bed, had I ever been suicidal because of my orientation etc. I wondered why I bothered opening my mouth in the first place. His interest was far from voyeuristic, he actually was concerned about my feelings and lifestyle and also wanted to be made aware of any possible health risks involved in being a lesbian.

This as you may well guess had me stunned - at least he was positive about my sexuality - but I began to wonder was he trying to blame my sexuality on my various illnesses. Talk about getting paranoid. As you can see from Anita Thoma's article on the Health Page lesbian patients and health professionals have a long way to go if they are to understand each other. But maybe if we came out to our doctors a bit more, they would begin to treat us with respect, dignity and a little compassion.

Another example of my tales of hospital heterosexism involved cervical smears. As I had cervical cancer, women readers can well imagine the many internal examinations I've had to go through. These became very painful and embarrassing and when I got the courage to

ask for a woman doctor to perform them I was told I was being unreasonable. "Doctor has seen it all before and he is as competent and caring as woman doctor", one very pushy middle-aged nurse told me. He may well have seen it all before but I would rather he not see me, and anyway hadn't I got a right to ask for a woman doctor? For those of us who cannot afford the luxury of Well Woman Clinic medicine, why are we not able to access the type of services we need.

How long will it take for the Department of Health and Hospitals and health professionals to recognise the needs of lesbians? It will take forever if we do not make a list of our needs and rights and present it to them. We also must make ourselves aware of the needs and possible health risks in the first place. Will we be waiting years until the Gay Mens Health Project has a sister venture? Lesbian groups and individuals have to get to grips with this and add this issue to the list of causes to campaign on. But it will have to be top of the list. It could be a matter of life or death.

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