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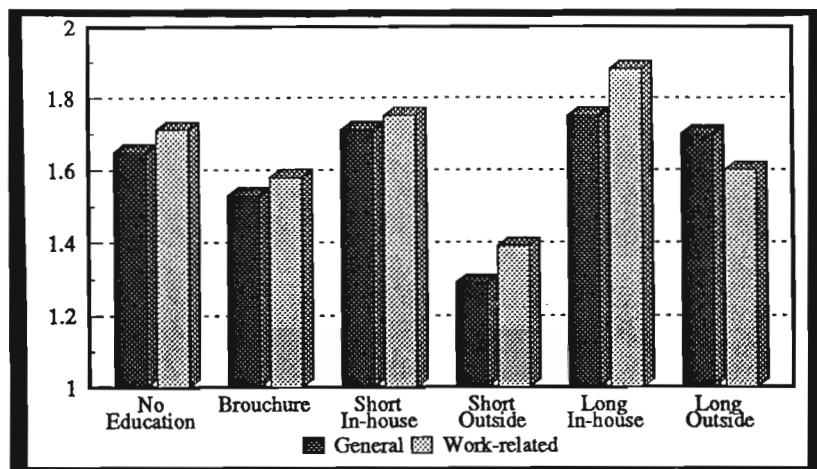
AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE:

WIDELY-USED EDUCATION PROGRAMS MAKE WORKERS LESS TOLERANT OF PERSONS WITH AIDS

Many of the programs used most by U.S. companies to educate their employees about AIDS may actually be making workers less tolerant of colleagues who have the disease, a new study at the Georgia Institute of Technology has found.

The study is believed the first to compare worker attitudes based on their exposure to different AIDS education efforts. The findings could help companies develop educational programs to deal with unfounded employee fears about AIDS patients and the potential workplace disruption which could result.

Comparing five categories of education efforts, the telephone study of several hundred Georgia workers



Attitudes toward persons with AIDS, for different education programs. Higher numbers correspond to more positive attitudes. Darker bars show general issues; lighter bars show work-related issues.

found that persons who attended short programs (less than two hours duration) presented by persons from outside the company were significantly less tolerant of persons with AIDS than workers who had received other forms of education -- or no education at all, reported Dr. David Herold, professor of organizational behavior at Georgia Tech.

"There is some evidence that the length of the educational exposure and the

source of it make a big difference in attitudes," he said. "Forty-five minute programs put on by outside agencies or consultants in the company cafeteria are very common, but I would caution companies against them."

One key factor in worker attitudes seemed to be whether the presentation was made by persons from inside or outside the organization.

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Workers who attended programs presented by company speakers -- regardless of their length -- expressed less concern about such issues as sharing rest room facilities or working next to persons with AIDS than employees who participated in programs from outside "consultants."

One reason, Herold suggested, is that persons from outside the organization may lack credibility on the work-related aspects of this highly emotional issue. In addition to their higher credibility, speakers from within the company may also do a better job of tailoring the program to address specific worker concerns.

The length of the presentation also appeared to be important, said Herold, who found that workers attending presentations of more than two hours tended to be more tolerant of persons with AIDS. He suggests that short presentations may focus on details of the disease and how it is transmitted, neglecting information about the social, humanitarian and emotional aspects of AIDS.

"Inside programs are more effective than outside programs in lessening the fear of people with AIDS, and longer programs tend to be better than shorter programs," Herold concluded.

Instead of relying on outside experts, he suggests companies train their own human resource or medical staff to make the presentations.

A follow up to attitude surveys done in 1988 and

1989, the study included only Georgia workers. But Herold said the results have national implications because the same types of training programs are used nationwide, and because earlier studies have shown that Georgia workers are representative of national attitudes.

The research did not study how well the different efforts educated workers about the disease itself. Herold believes public health concerns may be the goals of most existing AIDS education programs, but he suggests companies should look beyond those concerns to see how their training programs affect worker attitudes.

The study compared the attitudes of workers who received different types of AIDS education: brochures about AIDS, short presentations by persons from inside or outside the organizations, or in-depth presentations from either inside or outside presenters. The workers were asked, for example, how they felt about working alongside persons with AIDS, and whether they felt such persons should be allowed to remain on the job.

Only a Third of Workers Receive AIDS Education

Herold and Graduate Student John Maslyn found that only about a third of the employees questioned had received any sort of AIDS education at all. Of those, 45 percent received brochures or pamphlets, while another 30

percent attended short training programs. Just ten percent of the workers reported attending longer courses, while the remaining respondents had mixed experiences that could not be classified.

In general, said Herold, due to the preponderance of the less effective training methods in the survey, it appears that employees who had received AIDS education on the job were more likely to have negative feelings toward people with AIDS than were respondents who had received no education at all. Only for particular types of programs were respondents' attitudes more favorable than those who received no education.

Why should companies be concerned about worker attitudes toward AIDS patients?

"The costs to the workplace of the disease AIDS are not so much in the medical care costs of the patients as in the potential disruption among the people who don't have the disease," Herold explained. "The problem is not going to come from the guy who shows up and tells you he has AIDS. The problem is going to come from the 50 workers who walk out when they hear that."

The survey was conducted by telephone during the fall of 1990. A total of 530 randomly selected persons were questioned by the Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia.

Information on this study will be presented to the Academy of Management August 13 in Miami.