AIDS: EPIDEMIC OF FEAR
Why the Masters and Johnson study is wrong

By DR. ERNEST F. WONG

The biggest health story of the 1980s is undoubtedly the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. The AIDS virus has claimed many victims in this country. There were 33,382 cases of AIDS reported in this country as of February 16, 1988. In addition, there are hundreds of thousands to over a million people who probably have been infected with the virus.

There are also millions victimized by the epidemic of fear. This epidemic of fear grew out of ignorance and many conflicting reports generated in the media as well as in scientific journals. Many faulty conclusions were drawn on inconclusive data, or based on misconstrued data. Tragically there is also faulty information generated for secondary reasons or commercial gain. As a consequence, the public sometimes does not know what to think and many illogical, irrational and potentially harmful measures have been taken in reaction to this epidemic of fear.

Notable among these irrational measures have been mandatory premarital HIV (AIDS) testing, discrimination against HIV-infected children and adults, and mandatory HIV testing for immigrants. To add further fuel to this epidemic of fear, Drs. Masters, Johnson and Kolodny authored a book called Crisis. The book was immediately denounced by the AIDS experts of the world; probably the first time in the history of the AIDS epidemic these experts were unanimous on anything.

Among the conclusions drawn by Masters, Johnson and Kolodny are:

- That three million Americans are currently infected with the AIDS virus, twice the incidence estimated by the National Center for Disease Control (CDC). The authors also think that 200,000 non-drug users/heterosexuals are probably infected, an estimate nearly seven times higher than the CDC.

- That 1,600 contaminated blood samples may be escaping detection each year, with almost as many transfusion recipients becoming infected as before strict blood screening programs went into effect.

- That a critical tool in stemming the epidemic is mandatory HIV antibody testing—for couples seeking a marriage license, pregnant women, convicted prostitutes, and all hospital inpatients between the ages of 15 and 60.

Other conclusions are that the virus may be contracted from kissing, mosquitoes and other casual contact.

If there is anything positive to say about this book, it is that it may at least raise the consciousness in the heterosexual population that no one is immune to this disease. The virus does not discriminate; if one chooses to pursue high-risk behaviors he will have an equal opportunity to become infected.

Sadly, many conclusions drawn from this book are based on studies of biased data sampling. The authors alleged that three million people are infected. They came up with this number by doubling the CDC projection of 1.5 million people who are infected. They think that the number of infected people is probably double the CDC estimate because from their sampling of the population, the rate of positive results was much higher than those figures accepted by the scientific world.

There is no clear-cut way to chart or tabulate the number of people infected in this country. The figure of 1.5 million initially was derived by the CDC in mid-1986 from the projection based on the incidence found in military recruits. At that time the incidence was .04 percent of the patients sampled, and the CDC also noted a 10 percent annual increase in the number of people infected in other populations sampled. With the projected annual rise of 10 percent based on the prevailing incidence of .04 percent, they...