

Fighting Back: Defending the LGBT Mind and Body in Pennsylvania

As part of the city-wide celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Annual Reminder Demonstrations for gay rights, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the William Way LGBT Center are collaborating on **Fighting Back: Defending the LGBT Mind and Body in Pennsylvania**, an LGBT health history conference on October 18th & 19th.

Gay activists achieved their first national victory as a result of the confrontation with the American Psychiatric Association (APA) over homosexuality's classification as a mental illness in the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), first published in 1952.

Philadelphians Barbara Gittings and her partner Kay Lahusen were among the early activists who joined with Frank Kameny of the Washington DC Mattachine Society as they went up against the psychiatric establishment in the early 1970's.

Lahusen argued that it would be critical for a gay psychiatrist to expose the injustice and bad science of this classification and they recruited Temple University's John Fryer to take on this historic challenge in 1972. Appearing in mask and wig and using a voice distorting microphone, Fryer appeared with Gittings and Kameny at the annual APA meeting in Dallas. His hand-written speech can be found among his papers housed at HSP. The following year, the APA voted to remove the mental illness classification in the 1974 publication of the DSM.

Among the conference presenters to review this history are:

- Dr. Lance Wahlert, Assistant Professor, Department of Medical Ethics and Health Policy; and Director, Project on Bioethics, Sexuality, and Gender Identity, University of Pennsylvania
- Dr. Jack Drescher, co-editor of *American Psychiatry and Homosexuality*; *An Oral History*, and member of the World Health Organization's Working Group on the Classification of Sexual Disorders and Sexual Health
- Debra D'Alessandro, MPH, a public health activist will read Barbara Gitting's speech when she received the first "John Freyer Award" from the APA
- HSP staff will discuss the John Fryer collection

Gay and lesbian activists working with health care professionals were similarly challenged in organizing a response to the AIDS epidemic in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the 1980's. While activists were making civil rights advances, most people were still in the closet. Very few physicians were publicly out and targeted health care services directed to gay men were only just beginning. In the absence of support from the federal government, early response to the AIDS epidemic in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia fell to local health care providers and government pushed by community activists.

Among those discussing the early response to the AIDS epidemic in Philadelphia and

Pittsburgh are:

- W. Willson Goode, Mayor of Philadelphia, 1984 – 1992
- David Fair, first Director, AIDS Activity Coordinating Office
- Guy Oreido-Weston, AIDS Surveillance Investigator, Philadelphia Department of Public Health 1986
- David Acosta, founder of GALAEI, an AIDS service provider in the Latino community
- Tyrone Smith, an early African American AIDS activist
- Dr. John Whyte, a physician volunteer for the Lavender Health Project
- Dr. Nicolas Ifft, a clinician and activist with the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force
- Dr. Tony Silvestre, a LGBT health activist and Director of the Pitt Men's Study
- Dr. Randy Sell, a public health historian and professor at Drexel's School of Public Health
- Heshie Zinman, founder of the AIDS Library of Philadelphia and President of the LGBT Elder Initiative

[The complete conference schedule is available here.](#) ^[1]

Links

[1] <http://hsp.org/fighting-back-defending-the-lgbt-mind-and-body-in-pennsylvania-program>