

AIDS not part of gay issue

By MARY ANN BENITEZ

PUBLIC concern about AIDS should not be an issue in the debate surrounding the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Hongkong, local AIDS specialist, Dr Patrick Li, said.

Dr Li, who heads the AIDS Counselling and Health Education Service, said linking homosexuality with the AIDS issue was a "simplistic" view.

"There is still the social attitude against homosexuality in Hongkong. I think men would still be reluctant to come forward and admit they are homosexual even if the laws are relaxed," he said.

Dr Li said one argument for relaxation was that more homosexuals could be tested for the presence of the AIDS anti-body and then be counselled.

On the other hand, there are fears that relaxed laws would encourage more men to become homosexuals, he said.

Currently, the AIDS service tries to reach homosexuals through supportive individuals who distribute pamphlets but Dr Li admitted it is difficult to reach out to them as a group.

The pattern of infection in Hongkong, like in Western countries, is through the sexual route, with more men being infected than women at a ratio of four to one. Out of 122 AIDS carriers, all but three are men. Of the 13 AIDS victims, only one was a woman.

Visiting American AIDS expert, Dr Rick Williams, who on Monday said Hongkong's homosexuality laws should not be relaxed, believed the burden of stop-



Dr Rick Williams . . . women more responsible.

ping the spread of AIDS rested on women who remained in the low risk group.

Dr Williams, a lecturer at the University of Hawaii School of Medicine, said this was because there was little chance of changing the sexual behaviour of men.

"The women will eventually bear the greatest burden (for stopping AIDS), as they do for all sexually-transmitted diseases. The risk of a woman getting infected from an infected man in one contact is about one per cent, but for a man getting the virus

from an infected woman in the same situation is a tenth of one per cent," said the gynaecologist.

He said it was true that fewer women were infected than homosexuals. But among those infected by heterosexual contact, women outnumbered men by about four to one in the United States.

"And for me, I'd rather focus on the women because they seem to be more responsible," said Dr Williams, who is a member of the Hawaii Governor's Commission on AIDS.