

Herpes Viruses Association comments on murder accusation

In an ongoing murder trial it has been alleged that an argument that included accusations about genital herpes led to the fatal assault (see links below).

"This is a deeply distressing case and my heart goes out to the family, but I know nothing I can say can help anyone who has lost a loved one in such a dreadful way", said Marian Nicholson, director of the Herpes Viruses Association.

"It seems strange that the reference to genital herpes should have taken place in court since only the defendant and his lawyers could have known about this. I conclude that this is part of a strategy intended to establish that the defendant suffered from diminished responsibility because of his infection. The reality is that his consumption of eight pints of beer and wine (reported in the Manchester Evening News – see link below) probably had more to do with the offence than what was said in an argument.

It is regrettable that what is technically a minor skin condition has been surrounded with such an aura of horror that people feel justified in dragging out herpes as an excuse for murder. Millions of people in the UK have genital herpes – it is merely a cold sore in a different place. Most of them do not know because they do not have symptoms. The Herpes Viruses Association exists to help people get this in perspective. The unjustifiable use of the word in a murder trial has made our job harder."

Metro.co.uk, 6-6-08

A beautician was killed by her boyfriend because she suggested he had herpes, a court heard. Jillinda Fisher was strangled because she hit a 'raw nerve' in James Bellass during an argument.

He attacked her despite the fact she was madly in love with him and sent him romantic text messages shortly before she died, a jury was told. One read: 'I can't imagine my life without you.' In court, Bellass admitted contracting herpes – a sexually transmitted disease – before he met Ms Fisher, 26. He said the condition made him feel 'dirty' and say hurtful things to his girlfriend. 'I didn't feel I deserved her,' he said.



But during a drunken row in December last year she told him: 'I accepted you even with your disease,' sparking the attack at her home in Ecclestone, Lancashire. Bellass, 36, of Preston, denies murder at Preston Crown Court.

Ends

* Links to the story:

- http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/1052800_victim_loved_murder_accused
- <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/topstories/2008/06/06/jillinda-fisher-strangled-by-man-she-loved-89520-20596703/>
- http://www.metro.co.uk/news/article.html?in_article_id=164533&in_page_id=34#StartComments

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

The Herpes Viruses Association exists to promote better mental and physical health with regard to the family of herpes viruses. Its aims are:

1. To provide information to the public, to medical professionals and to the media.
2. To encourage the development of new treatments for herpes simplex.
3. To tackle stigma and the unnecessary trauma associated with the condition.

Herpes simplex viruses types 1 and 2 used to affect the oral (cold sores) and genital regions, respectively. This has changed in recent years so both types are now associated with genital infection¹. About 70% of the UK population carries this virus (type 1 or 2). Only one person in four who has a herpes simplex virus is aware of having outbreaks.