PS1 for 3/10/88#AIDS, BLOOD BANKS, AND TESTING#One can hardly turn on the television or pick up a newspaper without seeing or hearing news about AIDS. But much important and newsworthy information doesn't seem to find its way into the widely-watched or widely-read media.#For example, the February issue of the medical newspaper called (BF)Orthopedics Today(end BF) carried a front-page article about a report made by an orthopedist, Lorraine Day, M.D., of San Francisco General Hospital at a recent medical meeting in Baltimore. Her information about AIDS, testing, and blood transfusions was startling.#Prior to 1985, blood used in transfusions was untested for the HIV (AIDS) virus. When concern about AIDS became public, the risk of getting AIDS from blood transfusions was publicized as being 1 in 50,000 between 1975 and 1985.#However, Dr. Day said the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank admitted in October 1987 that, ""for more than two years, they have known that the blood supply was contaminated at the rate of 1:100, not 1:50,000. They did not inform patients; they did not inform the doctors who operated on patients; they did not inform the hospital. They just kept it a secret.''#The risk of acquiring the HIV virus from a single transfusion is said to be currently 1:100,000. However, Dr. Day said, ""the AIDS experts will admit, in private, that the virus, is mutating so rapidly that they don't have enough tests to screen for the viral mutations, so we really don't know how infected the blood supply is.''#She added that there is a ""longer and longer 'AIDS negative' window before a patient turns positive [she said that 'window' could be up to 18 months]. The tests are unable to detect the virus during that window, so the blood supply is (BF)still(end BF) contaminated with AIDS blood.''#Many more than half of the hemophiliacs who received transfusions prior to 1985 are infected with the AIDS virus, plus an unknown number of patients who had surgery between 1977 and 1985 when the blood was untested. ""One unit of AIDS

blood gives the patient a 100 percent chance of becoming AIDS antibody positive. There is no escape,'' said Dr. Day.#Today's testing of blood is about 96 percent accurate, which means that 4 out of 100 donors will not be identified because they are in the negative period of time before the test records them as positive. Those certainly are not reassuring odds if you are entering the hospital for surgery.#Why has it still not been made a crime for anyone who has engaged in high-risk behavior during the last ten years to donate blood to a blood bank? That's a good question to ask your Congressman or state legislator.#Dr. Day estimated that national AIDS costs in 1985 were $4.5 billion; in 1986, $8.6 billion; and projected for 1991, $66.4 billion. #Dr. Day complained vigorously about the risk to surgeons from operating on patients who have not been tested for AIDS. She pointed out that this risk comes not only from those who are in obvious high-risk groups, but also from any ""patient who has had a major operation during the years when they were not testing the blood supply for AIDS and who is unaware that he is positive.'' She warned surgeons to take a very good transfusion history of every surgical patient.#""Why should a surgeon be allowed to test the blood of a preop patient?'' she asked. ""For the same reason that the blood supply is checked: to protect a person -- the surgeon -- from AIDS-contaminated blood.''#""Surgeons who practice in states with mandatory testing for the AIDS virus know that a policy of not testing is no way to run an epidemic,'' she said. ""We are never going to control the AIDS epidemic unless we know who has the disease.''#Surgeons should also be tested so their patients can be accurately informed. Dr. Day charged that ""there is at least one surgeon in this country who is operating on patients; the AIDS experts know that he is antibody positive; none of the patients know.''#How important physicians believe AIDS testing is was shown by a survey of doctors taken in late

1987 by four medical newsmagazines and published in (BF)Surgical Practice News(end BF). By a 2-to-1 margin, responding surgeons indicated that they would refuse to treat patients who declined to be tested for AIDS.#Dr. James W. Curran, director of the AIDS program at the federal Centers for Disease Control, recently confirmed that, since the epidemic began, the following percentages have remained fairly constant: 73 percent homosexual men, 17 percent intravenous drug users, 4 percent heterosexuals, 3 percent victims of blood transfusions, and 3 percent undetermined.#The number of confirmed AIDS cases in the United States has now passed the 50,000 mark. One out of 61 babies born last month in New York City tested HIV positive.