

Houston Health

Summer 2000
Houston Department of
Health and Human Services



A Quarterly Newsletter for Advisory Councils of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services

Billboard Campaign Unveiled for African-American HIV/AIDS State of Emergency

The City of Houston and Eller Media recently unveiled an HIV/AIDS awareness billboard campaign targeting African-Americans with a kickoff event outside City Hall. Eller Media donated the use of 150 billboards for the project.

The billboard campaign is one of the public information activities outlined in the Mayor's HIV/AIDS State of Emergency Call to Action Plan. The HIV prevention messages are designed to increase levels of awareness of HIV/AIDS, encourage risk reduction and promote early HIV/STD screening.

AIDS is the leading cause of death among African American men and women between the ages of 25-44. African-Americans represent 61 percent of the newly reported HIV infections in Houston. Mayor Lee P. Brown declared a state of emergency on December 1, 1999.



Houston Department of Health and Human Services vehicles display HIV/AIDS messages. Below is a close up of an Eller Media billboard.



Black Church Lights the Way HIV Prevention Campaign

The Urban AIDS Ministry Task Force (UAM) is a coalition of African-American spiritual leaders, churches and faith based organizations working to prevent HIV/AIDS among African-Americans in Houston. The UAM joined the Balm in Gilead, a national capacity building organization, to launch the *Black Church Lights the Way: The Black Church HIV Testing Campaign* at St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston.

The campaign includes use of print media, radio and television advertisements that discuss the important role churches and faith leaders play in encouraging early HIV diagnosis and testing. In December 1999, a State of Emergency was issued by Mayor Lee Brown due to the dramatic increases in HIV/AIDS among African-Americans. In Houston/Harris County, 61 percent of HIV reports collected since January 1999 were in African-Americans.

To demonstrate the need for early HIV detection and the simplicity of the test, several Houston faith leaders, including Rev. Rudy Rasmus of St. John's United Methodist Church, Rev. Louie Alexander of Eleos Center and Minister Robert Muhammad of the Nation of Islam took the HIV test.

More than 180 ministers, faith leaders and other church personnel attended the one-day conference which featured a workshop and roundtable discussion on how churches can get more involved in HIV services. For more information about the Black Church Lights the Way, contact Anthony Hurst at 713-794-2908.



HIV Testing

The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention had record numbers of people tested for HIV at an event on June 29. They tested 997 people in six hours at The Power Center. The photo shows some of the crowd.

HIV/STD Prevention Gives Record Number of HIV Tests

National HIV Testing Day was on June 27. The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention was at the Sharpstown Mall providing education and testing. The City's HIV mobile unit tested 78 people and the educators reached about 250 others with incentives and educational information. The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention tested a record number of people for HIV at its event on June 29. They teamed up with KBXX radio station and gave free tickets to the Summer Jamm Concert to people who were tested. City contract agencies that helped to provide the testing were Over the Hill, Career and Recovery, Bread of Life, AAMA, AVES, Montrose Clinic, WAM Foundation and Project SOUL. The teamwork between the agencies and the city staff made the event a huge success.

The Bureau of HIV/STD also participated in the Gay Pride Parade on June 24. They passed out approximately 25,000 condoms, pins and keychains. Other agencies that participated were AVES and The Block.

Respect Houston's Summer Heat and Humidity

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) reminds the public that summer heat can be deadly. Each year 240 to 1,700 Americans die from heat-related illnesses. Many are young children, the elderly and those with chronic health problems.

The human body has mechanisms to maintain its optimal temperature of 98.6 degrees. As body heat increases, blood vessels dilate, releasing heat to the skin's surface. Adequate fluid levels in the body maintain blood pressure during this process. Sweat glands produce moisture which, as it evaporates, takes heat with it, lowering the body's internal temperature. As the temperature outside approaches, then exceeds internal body temperature, these mechanisms cannot operate efficiently. Even slight dehydration can affect the body's ability to cool itself. As the body becomes dehydrated, blood vessels constrict instead of dilating to maintain blood pressure. High humidity inhibits evaporation of perspiration and internal temperature rises.

As internal temperature approaches 105 degrees, neurons of the brain are literally cooked, producing the characteristic fever, headache, nausea and weakness of

heat exhaustion. "Floppy feet" are another common symptom of heat exhaustion. At this point, shade and a cool drink may restore the body's internal temperature. If the body is not cooled, heatstroke may ensue. In heatstroke, the blood clots, lungs fill with fluid and the heart fails. Without treatment, heatstroke is fatal eight out of 10 times.



To cool someone off quickly, put them in front of a fan and spray or pat tepid water on their skin. Ice baths can cause too-rapid cooling and possible hypothermia. You can, however use ice packs on pulse points in the neck, pelvis and underarms.

The best way to avoid heat-related problems is to drink water well before you feel thirsty. By the time the brain signals thirst, the body is already mildly dehydrated. Alcoholic drinks are not recommended because they dehydrate the body further. Fruit juices are a good

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The EIP Staff - From left are Harry Coleman, administrative supervisor; Brenda Simpson, case manager; Deborah Rankin, case manager; Margaret Haynes, administrative aide; and Johnny Harris, case manager.

HDHHS Early Intervention Program Provides Valuable Services

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) assists HIV positive people with early medical care, social services and referrals. Any newly diagnosed HIV positive individual or any individual who is HIV positive, but not accessing services, is eligible to participate. All services are free and confidential.

EIP offers Next Step - an educational workshop that provides comprehensive information on HIV/AIDS issues including overview of HIV disease, maintenance of HIV disease, stress management, nutritional guidance, understanding laboratory results, medical referrals, access to community resources and risk reduction strategies.

Medical assessments include an immune system panel (T4/T8), complete blood count, basic chemistry profile, TB skin test and syphilis screen.

EIP provides case managers to help HIV positive people access medical and social support services. A case manager also is available to work exclusively with women and children who have special needs related to pregnancy and child care.

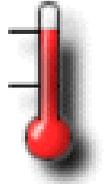
Support groups are offered monthly to assist clients dealing with HIV. Discussion topics include self motivation, sex and intimacy, nutrition, relationships, positive living skills and legal matters.

Program locations include the Medical Center office (HDHHS EIP Office) at 1115 South Braeswood #210 and Community-Based EIP organizations at the Montrose Clinic, 215 Westheimer and AVES, Inc. at 4126 Southwest Freeway.

Education and access to new medical options are important to maintain health and enhance the quality of life for HIV positive people. The EIP is designed to assist clients in developing decision-making skills about health care and dealing with HIV. For more information, call the EIP at 713-794-9660.

Heat and Humidity, continued

substitute for water and if exercising, sports drinks. Other tips are:



Get exercise and physical work out of the way early in the day, when it's cooler. Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing that permits the evaporation of perspiration. Stay out of direct sunlight when possible. A wide-brimmed hat helps prevent sunburn as well as heat-related illnesses.

If your house is not air-conditioned, visit cool places during the day - movie theaters, libraries, air-conditioned malls, stores or one of the HDHHS multi-service centers.



- Keep cool with cool baths, showers or use ice bags or wet towels.
- Naturally, never leave a person or a pet inside a closed car with no ventilation.
- Check on, in person, all frail and/or elderly friends or family to evaluate their coping ability with the heat.



Respect Houston's heat and humidity and have a great time this summer.

The Exodus of Medicare HMOs

The number of Medicare health maintenance organizations (HMOs) available to seniors in Harris County has dwindled from six to one. Secure Horizons by PacifiCare is the **only** Medicare HMO that will renew its contract with the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) for the year 2001. To ensure a smooth transition for seniors, HCFA, in agreement with the withdrawing HMOs, has developed the following information for Medicare HMO clients.



What can you expect if your Medicare HMO is leaving?

1. Each non-renewing Medicare HMO will send a letter to its members informing them of its intent to withdraw from the Medicare program effective January 1, 2001. Many Harris County seniors have already received this first letter.

As the local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), the Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) benefits counseling toll-free number was published in the first non-renewal letter sent by Medicare HMOs to its members/beneficiaries. The AAA has been flooded with calls from anxious seniors worried about their health care for the coming year.

Certified benefits counselors with the AAA are providing seniors in Medicare HMOs with information regarding their Medicare options. Additionally, the benefits counselors have scheduled and conducted outreach activities in the Harris County area to inform Medicare clients regarding their options and to allay some of their fears and anxiety.

The best advice for a Medicare beneficiary at this point is, *please do not panic.*

2. A second official letter will follow the first notice of non-renewal. This second notice must be dated **October 2, 2000**, and must contain the Medicare beneficiary's proper name and address. It is critical that any beneficiary receiving this second notice **keep the letter and the post-marked envelope.** This October 2, 2000 letter will explain the rights and protections of the Medicare beneficiary and the remaining options available for 2001.

Caution: Any action(s) taken before receipt of the October 2, 2000 letter may substantially impact the rights of the Medicare beneficiary. Medicare beneficiaries must therefore exercise extreme caution when considering their options and making choices.

What Are Your Options?

No matter what option the beneficiary selects, he or she will still be in the Medicare program and the Medicare HMO must continue to provide Medicare beneficiaries the same quality, uninterrupted service through December 31, 2000.

A Harris County Medicare beneficiary who is a member of a withdrawing HMO has two options:

Option 1:

Stay in the current Medicare HMO through December 31, 2000, and;

- return to the original Medicare plan with or without a Medigap/supplemental insurance policy, or

- enroll in another Medicare HMO effective January 1, 2001. At the present time the only Medicare HMO available in Harris County is Secure Horizons by PacifiCare.

Option 2:

Leave the current Medicare HMO before December 31, 2000, and

- return to the original Medicare Plan, with or without a Medigap/supplemental insurance policy

Caution: If a beneficiary disenrolls from a Medicare HMO before receipt of the October 2, 2000 official notice from the HMO, he or she will not be entitled to "guaranteed issue" rights. In other words, an insurance company can charge the beneficiary higher premiums or refuse to issue a policy based on the beneficiary's health condition, pre-existing conditions, and/or age.

or

- enroll in another Medicare HMO. At present the only HMO available for 2001 in Harris County is Secure Horizons by PacifiCare.

It is critical that Medicare beneficiaries make informed decisions about their choices. Each decision and its timing have significant ramifications on the options and rights protections of the beneficiary.

For beneficiaries who are absolutely certain that they **want to join** the one remaining Medicare HMO **and are absolutely certain that they do not want** to return to

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Exodus of Medicare

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traditional Medicare and possibly purchase supplemental insurance (known as a Medigap policy), these select few may enroll in the HMO at any time.

Please note that **special rules** apply if the Medicare beneficiary:

- is disabled and under the age of 65; has permanent kidney failure (end stage renal disease);
- has retiree coverage from a former employer or union; or
- is in the initial 12-month trial period with the HMO.

Confused? Concerned? Your Area Agency on Aging can assist.

If you are a Medicare beneficiary and need information regarding your Medicare options or if you know of beneficiaries in need of counseling, please contact a Certified Benefits Counselor with the **Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging at 713-794-9001.**

Medicare Briefings Scheduled

Six Medicare HMO Withdrawal Meetings have been scheduled to educate beneficiaries regarding their choices. Seniors concerned about their Medicare plan should attend one of the following meetings hosted by the Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging, the Houston/Galveston Area Agency on Aging and the Texas Department of Insurance. Representatives from Secure Horizons and Interfaith Ministries Senior Health Program will also be in attendance to address Medicare beneficiaries' concerns.

Tuesday, August 8, 2000

Conroe Friendship Center
2015 N. Frazier
Conroe, TX 77301
8:30 a.m.

South County Friendship Center
2235 Lake Robbins Road, The
Woodlands, TX 77380
10:30 a.m.

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet
Houston, TX 77074
1 p.m.

Metropolitan Multi-Service Center,
1475 West Gray
Houston, TX 77019
3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, August 9, 2000

Pasadena Senior Program
720 Fairmont Parkway
Pasadena, TX 77504
9 a.m.

J. W. Peavy Senior Center
3814 Market Street
Houston, TX 77020
3 p.m.

Other Sources of Information

To facilitate the availability of accurate information regarding Medicare HMO withdrawals, HCFA has produced fact sheets and frequently asked questions (FAQs) that are available on the Medicare website at www.medicare.gov. This information also is available from the Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging.

Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging 713-794-9001
www.ci.houston.tx.us/departme/health

Medicare
1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)
www.medicare.gov

Texas Department of Insurance
1-800-599-SHOP (7467)
www.tdi.state.tx.us

Secure Horizons
1-800-305-3300
www.securehorizons.com

Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston
Senior Health Program
(713) 522-3955 ext. 228 or 229
www.imgh.org

The Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is part of a nationwide network coordinating supportive services for the elderly as mandated by the Older Americans Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments.

The AAA plans and contracts for services for senior citizens throughout Houston and Harris County. With the Area Agency on Aging acting as an advocate, awareness of the needs of the elderly increases through services that assist the elderly and their families with options promoting independence, well-being and dignity. AAA's programs are tailored to meet the social, nutritional, educational and logistical needs of Harris County residents age 60 and older. Nutrition services include the home-delivered meal program for the homebound elderly and the congregate meal program at 48 senior centers in Harris County. Other services include respite care and homemaker services, care-giver training, dental, hearing, legal and transportation services.



Looking for an Assisted Living Facility? Know the Questions to Ask

Assisted living, a less structured option to nursing home care, offers accommodations with services such as assistance with medications and completing daily activities like bathing and dressing. Assisted living is customarily provided in a multi-unit facility. Because there are fewer regulations governing these facilities in comparison to that of nursing homes, it is imperative that you study the admission contracts and facilities in great detail. In fact, wherever possible, it is recommended that an elder law attorney review any contract before you sign it. When reviewing an assisted living contract, be sure you know the answer to the following questions before signing on the dotted line.

Monthly Fees:

- What is the basic rate?
- Are there additional charges for extra care? Under what circumstances is extra care needed and who makes that determination? Are family members notified in advance?
- Is there a security deposit?
- Under what circumstances can fees be changed?

Care Plan:

- Is a care plan detailing individual patient needs and desires completed on each resident?
- Is the family included in care plan development?
- How often is it revised?

Health Monitoring/Levels of Care:

- What procedures are in place to ensure a resident receives medication in timely fashion and is appropriately monitored?
- Will a resident receive more extensive attention if their condition declines?

When searching for an assisted living facility, it is imperative to know about the discharge policy. You should know the answers to the following questions:

Discharge policy:

- Under what circumstances should a resident be discharged?
- Who has the right to make the decision?
- Is there any type of notification and appeal procedures?

Know your rights regarding assisted living facilities. Keep in mind the following items:

The key element in the contract is the discharge policy.

A contract, once signed, is *extremely* difficult to change.

Aside from carefully checking such crucial items as the facility's discharge policy, consumers also should read any other important documents. Elder law attorneys also caution consumers against a practice known as "resident dumping."

It is wise to get help in selecting assisted-living facilities. Meanwhile, the assisted-living industry is maturing and improving.

For more information on assisted living agreements, contact these organizations:

- Consumer Consortium on Assisted Living publishes "Choosing An Assisted Living Facility" guide for \$5. Call 1-703-533-8121 or visit www.ccal.org.
- National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers - provides a list of care managers by state and city. Also lists other resources. Call 1-520-881-8008 or visit www.caremanagers.org.
- Assisted Living Federation of America - provides a consumer checklist and directory of facilities by state and city. Also has created a sample resident admission agreement consumers can refer to when evaluating residences. Call 1-703-691-8100 or visit www.alfa.org.
- National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys - offers a directory of members. Call 1-713-520-881-4005 or visit www.naela.org.

For further information on services available to seniors, please call the **Houston/Harris County Area Agency on Aging Access and Assistance Services at 713-794-9001**. Source: *New Lifestyles*; *Secure Retirement*; Peter Weaver.

Do you have suggestions for articles and/or photographs in this newsletter? Is there a certain part of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services you would like more information on? Call 713-794-9021 or send e-mail requests to webadmin@hlt.ci.houston.tx.us.

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