THE COMMUNITY MONITOR

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE HOUSTON MEDICAL MONITORING PROJECT

A UNAIDS Initiative

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

Empower Women: Fight AIDS

The **GCOWA** brings awareness to the issues of HIV/AIDS infections among women and been touring the world trying to bring attention to the huge numbers of women becoming infected every day. This is an effort to address these issues. There were three tour participants who are referred to as "ambassadors" living with the disease. Each of these women gave a brief account of how they were infected and how they had to fight discrimination, family rejection, as well as the stigma generally encountered by people living with the disease. At the end of their speeches, one thing that was clear and common to all of them was the issue of stigma, which was seen in Zambia, India and Honduras. The ambassadors are now activists in their societies and are responsible for organizing HIV support groups in their communities.

The Houston Perspective:

A forum was held on June 12, 2006, at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston. Support letters were sent and read to the forum by representatives of former President George W. Bush, Governor Rick Perry and Mayor Bill White.

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee discussed her struggles to make sure that more federal funds are made available in the struggle against the disease.

Council Member Ada Edwards called for more emphasis at the local level on prevention efforts; she also encouraged participants to play a more pro-active role in the struggle. Her statement, "We are the ones we have been waiting for," has become a mantra.

Dena Gray of HOPWA (Housing Opportunity for People With AIDS) presented a brief picture of the housing problems faced by People Living with HIV/ AIDS (PLWHA). To date there are only 200 housing units for PLWHA in Houston which has a population of about 15,000 people living with the disease. The challenges are enormous.

Judy Levison, MD, a local physician with the Women's Program at the Harris County Hospital District treats pregnant women living with the disease in the Houston area. Levison spoke about the issues relating to the care of women. Since the invention of the HAART, her program has had a total of about 136 pregnant women in care with only 1 child being infected through perinatal transmission, representing less than 1 percent of the patient population. She also stressed the importance of prenatal care and screening where most of these women discovered they were positive for the first time.

Marlene McNeese-Ward, Chief, Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention at the Houston Department of Health and Human Services and CAB member**,** gave a presentation of the epidemic in Houston and current prevention activities. She reported the majority of STDs, (Gonorrhea and Chlamydia) in Houston occurs mostly among the age group of 15-24 year olds. The implications are that they are still engaging in unprotected sex also predisposes them to HIV infections.

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THE GLOBAL COALITION ON WOMEN AND AIDS

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Sheryl McCurdy, PhD, provided the **global perspective** by elaborating on the activities by the UT School of Public Health in Tanzania. UTSPH staff studies the issue of infections among female sex workers who were IV heroin abusers. Staff found out that there were no programs available to help with the process of recovery for addicts, and the quest for money and more drugs made women in these areas engage in high-risk behaviors. There was rampant and widespread heroin abuse amongst this population of women. She closed by saying that the important thing is to empower women with education and property rights in their respective environment thereby providing them with the much needed voice in the fight.

What we learned was that he HIV/AIDS pandemic among women needs more attention; the pandemic among women brings the same stigmatization as with men; Sub-Saharan Africa has a large population of voiceless women currently infected, and these people need help to get into treatment and the required support groups; educating young women will help in reducing the infection rates; the fight requires the collaboration of many agencies to be successful; breaking the stigma should be the top priority of HIV/AIDS professionals and PLWHA; and the importance of the media in disseminating prevention steps should be a priority of anyone interested in reducing disease transmission.

Featured HMMP Team Member

James Gomez

James T. Gomez has been employed with the Houston Department of Health and Human Services since June of 2001. He initially was hired as a medical social worker, working at the Northside Health Center for the first 2 years before joining the Bureau of Epidemiology as an epidemiology investigator. Since that time, he has been a member of the Adult/Adolescent Study of HIV Disease Project (ASD), Hepatitis C Surveillance project, Adult/Adolescent HIV/AIDS Surveillance project, and assisted in general surveillance before becoming a member of the Houston Medical Monitoring Project . Gomez represents HMMP at the monthly Latino Task Force meetings and recently received a commendation from the CDC for his role in translating the HMMP interviewing tool into Spanish.

COMMUNITY RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

In developing contextually appropriate HIV/AIDS programs, it has long been recognized that there is a need for public health entities to partner at the local level with community based groups (CBOs), in addition to collaborating with university-affiliated research organizations, for the purpose of continuing advancements in prevention and treatment.

In Houston, two such research groups that are affiliated with the University of Texas School of Public Health are the Affiliated Systems Corporation (ASC) and the NOVA research company. Both of these organizations have published significant papers in peer-reviewed journals based on Houston gathered data concerning substance abuse, behavioral aspects in the transmission of HIV and the adverse economic impacts of HIV/AIDS, among others.

It is also recognized that often, the lay public increasingly desires to assist and contribute to the research agenda of various local research groups, especially in the area of promoting and disseminating research findings in which they have had a hand in formulating.

As an example, the HIV/AIDS Community Advisory Board (CAB), organized by the Houston Medical Monitoring Project (HMMP), will assist in contributing to the formation of a community-based understanding of various health characteristics of those living with HIV in the Houston metropolitan area. This participatory role of the Houston CAB will also assist in transferring back this knowledge to the community so it may be converted into useful prevention programs and support services for those persons living with HIV/AIDS.

DR. THOMAS GIORDANO, HMMP CAB MEMBER, FEATURED AS MONTHLY DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES AT THE HDHHS

Thomas Giordano, MD

Thomas Giordano, MD, MPH, obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology at John Carroll University in Cleveland, OH then completed a Master of Arts degree in the History of Art at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. His Doctor of Medicine degree is from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. His internship and residency in internal medicine were completed at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. He completed a fellowship in HIV Clinical Research at Baylor College of Medicine.

Dr. Giordano joined the Baylor College of Medicine faculty in 2002. He is an assistant professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine with a primary appointment in the Section of Infectious Diseases and a secondary appointment in Health Services Research. He is also a scientist in the Houston Center for Quality of Care and Utilization Studies, a Department of Veterans Affairs' Center of Excellence in Health Services Research. Dr. Giordano is medical director of HIV services for the Harris County Hospital District, which includes the Thomas Street Health Center, one of the largest HIV clinics in the U.S. Dr. Giordano's research focuses on access and adherence to care among persons with HIV infection in the United States, race/ethnicity-based disparities in outcomes in people with HIV/AIDS, and on ways to improve the effectiveness of the treatment of HIV/AIDS.

On August 24t, Dr Giordano will present a perspective of HIV/AIDS care in the Houston and Harris County area. He will focus on reviewing the epidemiology of the infected but undiagnosed, those who are diagnosed but not in care, and the challenges and complexities of caring for HIV-infected patients in Houston. It will take place from 3p.m.-4p.m., at the Houston Dept. of Health and Human Services located at 8000 N Stadium, 4th floor in the department operations center.

DR ANDRADE, HMMP CAB MEMBER, REPRESENTS HOUSTON AT THE CDC NATIONAL MMP PROVIDER ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Roberto Andrade, MD

Dr. Roberto Andrade is an assistant professor at the Baylor College of Medicine, Section of Infectious Disease. He is also the director of HIV/AIDS education at Thomas Street Clinic in Houston.

Dr. Andrade received his medical doctorate degree from Ecuador and completed an internal medicine residency program at the Atlanta Medical Center in Atlanta. As part of his postgraduate training, he completed an infectious disease fellowship at the University of Texas Health Science Center and the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. He has an extensive research and clinical background that includes over 10 years of pre-and post-medical doctorate research, and patient care in Ecuador and the U. S. respectively. He is a member of the AIDS Research Group at the Baylor College of Medicine and he is currently listed as a principal or co-investigator in many international and local research studies.

He is actively involved in the clinical care and management of HIV/AIDS patients and has co-authored many scientific papers in internationally acclaimed journals in the area of HIV/AIDS. He is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine and his affiliates include the Infectious Diseases Society of America, Houston Infectious Diseases Society, and the HIV Medicine Association.

Dr. Andrade recently represented HMMP at the CDC MMP national provider advisory board meeting in Atlanta. Approximately 20 physicians from representative parts of the nation attended this important event, where the CDC team provided an update on the progress of the project.

The CDC team agreed with the PAB member's suggestions to improve communication and marketing through a wider variety of professional associations, including the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), the American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM), the AIDS Education & Training Centers (AETC), the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC) and others. The CDC MMP website will be expanded to include an updated MMP provider slide set.

Relevant information from this meeting was to hear experiences from different sites, sharing the success and also the limitations they encounter during facility and provider recruitments efforts. One of the challenges is to make the community aware of this important project. Everyone needs to be represented, because results from this survey will impact local and national policies and will help to decide how money and treatments services can best be used to benefit people living with HIV/AIDS.

NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY

The Windsor Village United Methodist Church hosted a luncheon to recognize National HIV Testing Day on June 27. The event, *Living Life to the Fullest*, was sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim pharmaceuticals. State representative Garnet Coleman was in attendance to provide words of encouragement and educate attendees on political efforts to prevent further spread of HIV. The event ended with a panel discussion followed by free HIV testing. Panelist included Dr Joseph Gathe, of Donald R. Watkins Foundation, Barbara Joseph of Positive Efforts, Marjorie Williams of Center for AIDS, and former NFL star Spencer Tillman.

Tillman revealed that HIV hit home for him when his older brother died of AIDS in 1992. He urged the African-American community to know their status. Mr. Tillman is featured in an educational video by Boehringer Ingelheim pharmaceuticals titled "Living Life to the Fullest". In the video he encourages others to become proactive in the fight against AIDS. Tillman emphasized that so much more is known about the disease which was once thought of as a death sentence. "In fact, you can continue to work, have meaningful relationships, and raise a healthy family," Tillman said. Living successfully with HIV is something that's doable -- and it's worth doing!"

State Rep. Garnet Coleman, Dan Snare, of Bering Omega and HMMP CAB member, and Tai Fasoranti, MD of HMMP at WAM.

Dr. Joseph Gathe explained that today's HIV drug therapy responds better to the individual patient's needs. He stressed that the way to live with the disease is to learn all you can about it and work closely with your doctor to ensure the best treatment choices. "Early detection and monitoring of HIV can increase one's ability to combat the disease," Gathe said.

St. Hope Foundation partnered with Gilead Sciences and The Essence Festival to host three HIV testing sites during the week of National HIV Testing Day in June. On June 27, St. Hope provided rapid HIV testing at both Sharpstown Mall and Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Wheeler Avenue Church was the site of a town hall meeting hosted by Gilead Sciences and *Essence*. Town hall speakers included Houston City Council Member, Ada Edwards, St. Hope's Medical Director, Dr. Stanley T. Lewis, Houston Department of Health and Human Services Bureau Chief, Marlene McNeese-Ward, HOPWA Manager and HIV Activist, Dena Gray and St. Hope's Executive Director, Rodney N. Goodie.

On June 28, St. Hope's staff targeted the Sunnyside community with rapid HIV testing at the Sunnyside Multi-Service Center. St. Hope works hard to provide quality counseling and testing during mass testing events by utilizing it's mobile unit, a number of tents to provide client confidentiality and the work of all St. Hope staff members to reach as many people as possible with HIV testing and education. A total of 235 people were tested over the two-day period. St. Hope distributed Essence show tickets to 100 lucky drawing winners as an incentive to people who tested and picked up their results.

TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION 81ST ANNUAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

HEALTHY COMMUNITITIES: THE BIG PICTURE

M. Chin & O. Mgbere

As part of the Houston Medical Monitoring Project (HMMP), HDHHS staff are encouraged to attend conferences, workshops and meetings. There have also been internal collaborations with other bureaus on a series of on-going projects. Recently, Dr. Osaro Mgbere, biostatistician/data manager and Martin Chin, health program specialist, were supported by the Bureau of immunization to attend the 81st Annual Education Conference organized by Texas Public Health Association (TPHA) and City of Plano Health Department at Legacy Town Center, Plano, Texas . They had a poster presentation on "Preliminary Appraisal of Hospital-based Influenza Surveillance Program in Houston, Texas 2004-2005." Their presentation was an attempt by the Bureau of Epidemiology to model a comprehensive influenza surveillance program for the City of Houston using various sources of data available. Highlights of the conference were the workshop on 'grant and proposal writing' presented by Catherine Pepper, MLIS of the University of North Texas at Forth Worth, which marked the beginning of the conference. Series of scientific papers and posters in public health areas were presented. The conference featured lectures, discussion, questions and answers and interactive breakout sessions. Also, exhibits of commercial and educational materials added colors to the meeting that was attended by more than 600 public health practitioners within and outside the State of Texas.

AFH SUMMER CAMP PROVIDES HOPE, UNDERSTANDING, & GIVING

Camp H.U.G. (Hope, Understanding, and Giving), designed and implemented in 1997 as a Leadership Houston Class XV community project, was the first and only camp program in the greater Houston area specifically designed for Persons Living With HIV/AIDS and their families. In 1998, AIDS Foundation Houston assumed ownership of the project, which continues to provide a weekend experience at **Camp For All** each spring for more than 40 families from all over Texas. Recreation remains the focus of Camp H.U.G., where children enjoy traditional camp activities and caregivers participate in workshops addressing psychosocial issues of raising children and adolescents living with HIV/AIDS.

While children participate in camp activities like swimming, canoeing, archery and fishing, caregivers and family members attend workshops that cover family issues surrounding the disease such as death and dying, grief, guilt and sibling dynamics. Emphasis is placed on sharing experiences and learning new coping skills.

Camp H.U.G. helps more than 115 children meet other children and families who share similar circumstances. Families leave the camp with tools to help them face the challenges of caring for a child impacted by HIV/AIDS.

In May, Houston Department of Health and Human Services employees Michele LaLand, surveillance investigator for HMMP, and Beau Mitts, HIV/STD Prevention Manager and HMMP CAB member, spent a weekend as camp counselors for Camp H.U.G. Michele and Beau were assigned cabins of girls or boys and shared the responsibility with other volunteer camp counselors. For more information on this very special program, call 713-623-6796 or visit www.aidshelp.org. This is a great place for smores and karaoke!

Michele LaLand & Beau Mitts

Isn't He Cute?!

It's Yoga Time!!

This *Is* A Serious Briefing.

Fun on the Hayride

Beautiful Camp For All

What is Incidence Surveillance?

Houston Incidence Surveillance (HIS) is a remarkable new activity that will assist the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) to gain a more complete picture of the HIV epidemic. In the past, HIV surveillance has been limited to monitoring the prevalence of persons living with HIV/AIDS infection and HIV/AIDS related mortality. However, with the help of a new medical technology HIV incidence can now be measured. In this context, incidence refers to the number of individuals infected with the HIV virus in the past year.

Recent infections are identified using the Serologic Testing Algorithm for Recent HIV Seroconversion (STARHS). STARHS is a technique that uses two enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISAs). Each blood specimen is tested with both the standard ELISA and a less sensitive version of the ELISA used just for STARHS. Specimens that react on the more sensitive standard ELISA, but not on the less sensitive ELISA, indicate a lower level of HIV antibodies and is more likely a newer infection.

HIV incidence surveillance involves collaboration between state and local health departments, epidemiology or surveillance units, private and public health laboratories, counseling and testing centers, other HIV testing sites and CDC. The goal of Houston-HIS is to conduct and to incorporate HIV incidence surveillance into all existing and routine HIV/AIDS surveillance activities in Houston and Harris County. The program proposes to achieve the goal by collaborating with local laboratories, community-based organizations (CBOs), private providers and HDHHS disease prevention programs to obtain data on HIV testing from the target population, and to appropriately identify those samples of serum that may be considered eligible for STARHS, *and* verification of recent HIV infection. For more information, call 713-794-9181.

HMMP'S COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Latino HIV Task Force

Los Latinos unidos contra el SIDA

The **Latino HIV Task Force (LHTF)** is comprised of Houston health agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) providing HIV/AIDS prevention programs or medical treatment to Hispanics. The LHTF was originally convened by the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) in 2002.

The most recent event in which the LHTF participated was the National HIV Testing Day. The task forces also participated in the celebration of the Cinco de Mayo event which was held in May at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston. Univision Communications, Inc. provided a booth for the LHTF to disseminate HIV prevention information to the general public.

Among the organizations that comprise the LHTF are: AIDS Foundation Houston, Amigos Volunteers in Education and Services (AVES), Community Family Centers, Fundacion Latino Americana Contra el SIDA (FLAS), Houston Area Community Services (HACS), Legacy Community Health Services, Harris County Hospital District, St. Hope Foundation, American Red Cross, Project WAVE Family Services, Texas Children's' Hospital, Planned Parenthood, and the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA).

The chair of that group is Elias Chino, the executive director of FLAS, Inc. His number is 713-772-2366 and his e-mail is eliasflasinc@hotmail.com. He may be contacted for a schedule of upcoming meetings.

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HERE

EDUCATE GIRLS

FIGHT AIDS

FOLD

POSTAGE

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