



STD EXAMINER

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November 1997

Volume 2, Number 4

Remarks from Dr. Richwald

Flaws in Los Angeles County's public health system were in the spotlight again recently, with September's release of a Public Health Programs and Services (PHP&S) review by the UCLA School of Public Health. Though critical of PHP&S as a crippled bureaucracy, the report, commissioned by County Health Services Director Mark Finucane, is a milestone in forthrightly addressing our problems.

The hundred-page report was based on a three-month study of PHP&S by a senior panel of UCLA public health faculty. While praising the "great expertise and dedication in PHP&S disease control programs," the report makes several recommendations for improvement which are particularly relevant to the STD Program: reorganize PHP&S, specifically allocating more authority to the District Health Officers; develop and establish an adequate data and communication system; and streamline County procedures and increase the budget.

For STD control, a budget increase for the Program is especially important. The STD Program federal STD prevention grant has not increased in the past eight years--even as costs of STD control have gone up significantly. As the report states, a five-year decline in the County appropriation for public health has also led to a substantially lower rate of per capita public health funding in Los Angeles than in other jurisdictions around the country.

I agree with the report that a key to improving County health leadership is to strengthen the role of the District Health Officer, who is on the front line of carrying out the DHS mission for community health.

The UCLA report is highly critical of the PHP&S data and communication system. At

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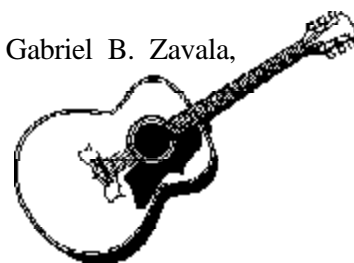


Mariachi Band Vocalizes Musical HIV/STD Education

A young man leaves his beloved wife and children in Mexico to labor in the U.S. Alone for many months, he finds comfort on the streets. Unaware that he has caught HIV, he returns to Mexico and infects his pregnant wife.

This is the cautionary tale of "Juan's Tragedy," a ballad written and performed by the Los Amigos Mariachi Band for clients of L.A. County STD Program's Recent Immigrant HIV/STD Prevention Project. This popular band has worked with the project since 1994, spreading its musical messages about HIV/STD prevention to Latino day laborers at project outreach sites.

According to the band's leader, Gabriel B. Zavala, mariachi music is an ideal way to reach Spanish-speaking recent immigrants because the format is a familiar one. "People listen to those lyrics," says Zavala. "We can see it in the way they look at each other and nod."



The mariachis are an integral component of the STD Program's outreach project for recent immigrants, which is funded by the L.A. County Office of AIDS Programs & Policy and operated by the STD Program's Community Outreach Services Unit. The project's bilingual outreach workers provide individual and group HIV/STD risk reduction counseling, condom use and syringe/needle cleaning demonstrations, and communication skill building at approximately 20 community locations where day laborers congregate to find work. Staff also assist clients in accessing health care and community services such as English language schools, job training, alcohol and drug treatment, homeless shelters, food banks and immigration assistance.

Project staff visit each site every two weeks. Once every six months, the project offers on-site testing for HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and hepatitis B at each location, accompanied by the mariachis. In addition to "Juan's Tragedy," the band plays three other songs

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Clinical Corner

Ectoparasites: A Common, Costly Problem

“Pubic lice don’t care who you are, what your status is in life. No matter how impressive a person is, if he comes into your clinic and says, ‘I itch in the crotch,’ look in the crotch,” said Dr. Victor D. Newcomer, a Clinical Professor of Medicine/Dermatology at the UCLA School of Medicine. Dr. Newcomer began the September STD Program inservice discussing the many problems of diagnosing and controlling ectoparasites, including pubic lice.

From fleas to mites to bed-bugs and more, Dr. Newcomer spoke about their tell-tale bites, and how clinicians are often poorly informed about them. “Ectoparasites are a common cause of skin problems,” he said, “Clinicians should remember that they are still very much around.”

One such ectoparasite currently at epidemic proportions in Los Angeles is scabies. In the past year, there have been an average of 20 scabies cases per month in local long-term health care facilities--down considerably from a decade ago, but still at a recent high. Caused by *Sarcoptes scabiei*, and transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, scabies accounts for between 2-4% of dermatologic visits. A scabies rash, which causes severe itching, can take up to two months to develop after exposure, and can be transmitted without symptoms. Common locations for scabies rashes are the elbow, webs of the fingers, buttocks, genital area, and penis.

Scabies can look like a number of other skin problems, according to Dr. Carol L. Peterson, a Medical Epidemiolo-



gist from the LACDHS Acute Communicable Disease Program (ACD), who also spoke at the inservice about recent scabies outbreaks in L.A. County. “The most common misdiagnosis for scabies is psoriasis, followed by drug reaction,” Peterson said, “It’s also often mistaken for insect bites and dry skin.”

For those in STD control, it is especially important to be able to recognize crusted scabies-- a form of scabies on the increase which can occur in people who are immuno-suppressed, such as those with HIV or AIDS. Crusted scabies is highly contagious, and is suspected as one of the causes for the recent increase in costly scabies outbreaks at local acute care facilities. “What’s discouraging is that many physicians don’t view scabies as an important problem,” said Peterson, “Despite the warnings about scabies that ACD has sent out to all dermatologists in the County, hospitals are having second outbreaks.”

Both Newcomer and Peterson agree that 5% permethrin (Elimite) cream is the best current treatment for scabies, with a 91% cure rate. Lindane (Kwell) cream, another common treatment, is comparatively less effective with a 65% cure rate, and can also be highly toxic if over-used.

As usual, though, prevention can save thousands of dollars in treatment. Said Peterson, “What we’re recommending is that if you have a patient with a suspicious rash, put them on contact isolation until you’ve made a definitive diagnosis.”

Prenatal Care Cuts Imminent for Undocumented Women

Despite outcries from local health care agencies about the dangers of cutting publicly funded prenatal care for undocumented women, Governor Pete Wilson’s order to eliminate this program appears to be moving steadily toward implementation. The Medi-Cal funded program is set to be discontinued December 1, 1997 for new undocumented applicants, and January 1, 1998 for undocumented women already enrolled in Medi-Cal. (For a story on the order’s potential impact on STD control, see the November 1996 issue of the *STD Examiner*.)

Local advocates fear that undocumented women, hearing of the cuts, will soon begin to forgo all pregnancy care. “Right now, it’s very important that health care providers encourage undocumented women to continue seeking medical care,” says Lynn Kersey, Director of Maternal Child Health Access. Kersey says that Medi-Cal will continue to reimburse emergency as well as labor and delivery services even if the existing prenatal program is eliminated.

Wilson signed the order in August, 1996, though several

court challenges put temporary holds on the measure. A year later, in August 1997, the California Legislature enacted a final budget containing new language re-authorizing the program and funds for prenatal care for undocumented women. However, Wilson specifically vetoed the language

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Director

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the STD Program, we expect that our new data system, STD*Casewatch, will address the inadequacies of our current surveillance and case management systems. Unfortunately, the CHS-STD Program clinic control report, despite a two-year effort to improve it, has apparently fallen considerably short of the mark.

In his epilogue to the report, Mr. Finucane says he has asked the Public Health Commission to conduct a series of community forums to share and discuss the study, and to figure out how to implement the report’s recommendations. We at the STD Program fully support his continuing efforts to examine and reform our public health system.

STD DataWatch

Reported STDs in Los Angeles County, 2nd Quarter 1997.* Provisional data; rates per 100,000 population.**

HEALTH DISTRICT	CHLAMYDIA			GONORRHEA			EARLY SYPHILIS [†]			CONGENITAL SYPHILIS		
	Cases	Rates [‡]	% Change ^H	Cases	Rates [‡]	% Change ^H	Cases	Rates	% Change ^H	Cases	Rates [‡]	% Change ^H
Alhambra	99	132.0	+24	8	10.3	+50	1	1.1	---	0	0.0	---
Bellflower	154	220.8	+24	28	38.8	+19	2	2.3	-67	0	0.0	---
Central	237	360.2	+16	69	101.3	+6	10	12.4	-69	1	66.2	-75
Compton	302	542.1	+20	91	157.8	+5	5	7.3	-79	1	58.7	-50
East L.A.	142	307.4	+35	7	14.6	+10	3	5.3	0	0	0.0	-100
East Valley	213	258.2	0	27	31.6	+1	3	3.0	-25	0	0.0	-100
El Monte	193	203.4	-9	14	14.3	+10	3	2.6	-40	0	0.0	---
Foothill	98	162.5	+25	17	27.2	+14	5	6.8	-17	0	0.0	---
Glendale	88	135.2	+13	9	13.4	+6	6	7.5	+99	0	0.0	---
Harbor	115	289.8	+26	21	51.1	+4	1	2.1	-67	0	0.0	---
Hollywood-Wilshire	299	299.4	+18	127	122.8	+4	15	12.2	-49	1	52.0	0
Inglewood	385	478.4	+9	154	184.8	+6	32	32.4	+38	3	150.5	---
Northeast	229	316.1	+30	23	30.7	+8	3	3.4	-40	1	61.0	-50
Pomona	150	140.6	-15	36	32.6	+25	5	3.8	+398	1	48.2	---
San Antonio	277	319.4	+41	22	24.5	+9	7	6.6	-42	0	0.0	---
San Fernando [^]	248	196.2	+47	60	45.8	+4	6	3.9	-34	0	0.0	-100
South	261	779.4	+20	117	337.5	+10	24	58.4	+4	4	357.5	-20
Southeast	159	502.6	+10	37	113.0	+9	11	28.3	-9	1	85.7	-50
Southwest	459	614.0	+16	182	235.2	+14	29	31.6	0	3	183.7	-57
Torrance	146	167.5	+12	20	22.2	+4	2	1.9	-34	0	0.0	---
West	184	151.3	+28	48	38.1	-2	1	0.7	-67	0	0.0	---
West Valley	338	227.0	+51	27	17.5	+10	5	2.7	-45	1	33.1	---
Whittier	127	199.1	+20	18	27.3	+21	1	1.3	-75	0	0.0	-100
DISTRICT SUM	4,903			1,162			180			17		
District Unknown	1,182			231			2			0		
COUNTY TOTAL	6,085	274.1	+19	1,393	62.7	+8	182	8.2	-28	17	44.7	-35

* Based on the disease week calendar (3/30/97 to 6/28/97).

**Rate calculations are based on the 1996 population estimate.

§ Early Syphilis=Primary, Secondary, and Early Latent Syphilis.

[‡] Rates adjusted for cases with Health District Unknown.

[†] Percent change in rate from 2nd quarter 1996 to 2nd quarter 1997.

[‡] Rates expressed per 100,000 live births. 1996 birth figures used.

[^] Includes cases reported from Antelope Valley.

Mariachis Aid Outreach Project

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has written especially for the project, including "Hazte la Prueba" ("Take the Test"), a song encouraging HIV testing, and "A Favor de la Vida" ("In Favor of Life"), which urges listeners to use protection so they can take care of their families. The songs are performed in traditional mariachi style and are alternated with more familiar mariachi songs.

Day laborers at the sites, many of whom cannot or do not read written educational materials, seem to pay close attention to the HIV/STD-themed songs. When surveyed, 75% are able to remember the song themes and discuss the content of the lyrics. Just as importantly, says Greg Perez, the project coordinator, the mariachis create a festive atmosphere that attracts people and encourages them to participate in project services. "We were really fortunate to find this particular group," says Perez. "They have a way of motivating a crowd that's not easy to find."

Los Amigos Mariachi Band has recently completed a recording of their HIV/STD education songs which will be distributed to project clients on cassette tapes. Zavala is proud of the role he and his group are playing in the community. "I feel," he says, "like I'm doing something good for my people."

Update: Prenatal Care Cuts

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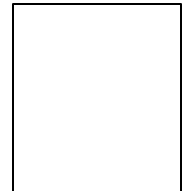
and most of the funds before signing the budget.

The STD Program, in addition to releasing a report detailing the negative health and fiscal impact of the regulations on communicable disease control, participated in three press conferences with a broad-based coalition of agencies protesting the cutbacks. STD Program Director Dr. Gary Richwald also submitted a declaration to the National Immigration Law Center and testified at public hearings on the regulations' potential adverse impact.

While continuing to fight the cutbacks, the coalition is now holding meetings on contingency planning. Plans focus on finding alternative sources of funding; adopting an abbreviated prenatal care schedule for low-risk women; disseminating critical prenatal care messages (such as warning symptoms in pregnancy) in non-clinical settings; and keeping women and clinicians updated on the best actions to take in response to the regulations. Additionally, the STD Program is designing a system to measure the impact of the cuts.

Dr. Robert Bragonier, Director of LACDHS Maternal Health and Family Planning Program, reiterates that women should continue to seek prenatal care, apply for Medi-Cal to ensure coverage for labor and delivery, and call 1-800-4BABY-N-U for further assistance. "Above all," says Bragonier, "pregnant women must not be frightened into forsaking health care."

STD Examiner
Los Angeles County STD Program
2615 S. Grand Avenue, Room 500
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STD Examiner is published quarterly by the Los Angeles County Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Program. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

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