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WESTCHESTER COUNTY RELEASES RESULTS OF FIRST COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON HIV/AIDS IN A SUBURBAN AREA, NATIONWIDE

Coinciding with the observance of World AIDS Day, the Westchester County Department of Health today released preliminary results of a groundbreaking longitudinal study that will impact those living with HIV and AIDS in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland Counties.

“Although many focus on Thanksgiving celebrations this week, it is important to remember those with HIV/AIDS on December 1st, World AIDS Day. I encourage all Westchester residents to join one of the many World AIDS Day observances being held in their communities,” stated Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health.

“This, the first comprehensive study on HIV/AIDS in a suburban area nationwide, demonstrates where we are similar to urban areas and where we differ,” stated Dr. Lipsman. “For example, both groups surveyed in the tri-county area and in New York City report similar adherence patterns to prescribed drug regimens. A surprising difference is that very few people in their 20’s in the tri-county area are engaged in care (12%) as compared to those in their 20’s in New York City (25%) engaged in care.”

While this study was conducted in the Westchester and tri-county area, other suburban areas would likely find it useful given that this study is more representative of the populations in other parts of the country than the studies done in the past for large urban areas like New York City.

The Tri-County Community Health Advisory and Information Network (CHAIN) study, conducted by researchers of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, surveyed nearly 400 HIV-positive adults in the tri-county area. Among the findings were:

- Approximately 55% of the individuals interviewed in the study have been or are currently married, and 35% report having children under 18 years old in the household.
- 14% of respondents reported that they had a sibling who was HIV-positive.

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- 89% of the individuals interviewed in the study reported either moderate or high levels of stigma related to HIV, with women being more likely than men to express high levels of perceived stigma.
- 60% of the individuals interviewed in the study said they did not have access to a car. This proved to be a considerable barrier for individuals living in more suburban or rural areas in the region.
- AIDS-diagnosed individuals living in the region were 40% less likely to be on the recommended medication regimen for advanced stages of the disease, than was a comparable group of AIDS-diagnosed individuals in New York City.

Funded by a federal grant through the New York HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council, and under the guidance of the Westchester County Department of Health, the Tri-County CHAIN study serves as an evaluation and planning tool for medical and social service providers, policymakers, consumers and advocates.

“This research gives those people living with HIV/AIDS a voice to speak to public health providers and policy makers to recognize needs, service trends, barriers to care, and health outcomes of those with HIV/AIDS from their own perspective,” stated Dr Lipsman. “These invaluable data can assist funding sources such as the Ryan White Care Act to commit to fill the gaps that currently exist for those who are in dire need of care. The Health Department and other public health providers can also use these data to target our outreach programs to those populations that are either unaware they are infected, or not seeking care from local providers.”

As a highlight of World AIDS Day, Dr. Joshua Lipsman will be discussing the CHAIN project with the study director, David Abramson, Columbia University, on December 2nd on WVOX radio, 1460 AM, from 2:30 – 3:00 p.m.

In addition to the CHAIN study, the Westchester County Department of Health has created a newspaper guide targeted toward young people to bolster HIV prevention behaviors. An English/Spanish, eight-page newspaper supplement will be distributed to over 50,000 Westchester County teens through their schools by The Journals News “Newspapers in Education” program to be used in classrooms to educate students on how to avoid contracting HIV.

Other World AIDS Day activities through Westchester County include:

- The Urban League of Westchester County along with the City of Mt. Vernon, Mt. Vernon Task Force on AIDS, Mt. Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, and the Health and Wholeness Ministry of Grace Baptist Church will observe World AIDS Day on Monday, December 2nd, with a series of events to last throughout the day.
- ***The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt Display***, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Getty Square, 1 Hudson Street, Yonkers, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Ten panels from the Names Project quilt - the largest on-going community arts project in the world - will be displayed.
- ***Interfaith Vigil of Remembrance and Hope***, St. John’s Episcopal Church at Getty Square, 1 Hudson Street, Yonkers, 12:00 noon to 1:30 p.m.

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- **World AIDS Day Proclamation Ceremony**, Yonkers Police Athletic League, 127 North Broadway, Yonkers, 3:00 p.m.
- **Youth Rally**, Yonkers Police Athletic League, 127 North Broadway, Yonkers, 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The Youth Rally is both an entertaining and educational event where hundreds of Yonkers' youth have an opportunity to meet well-known recording artists, receive free CD samples, and enjoy the latest D.J.s mix their favorite music, all while learning about the risks associated with HIV/AIDS from local health educators.
- Hudson River Community Health is coordinating World AIDS Day events on the evening of Monday, December 2nd. Beginning at 6 p.m., at the Library Plaza (Nelson Avenue and Main Street, Peekskill).
- The White Plains Hospital Center (Davis Avenue at E. Post Road) will observe World AIDS Day on Monday, December 2nd, with an **HIV/AIDS Information Table**, located in the Main Lobby, and staffed from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- The Westchester Medical Center (95 Grasslands Road) in Valhalla, will be observing World AIDS Day on Monday, December 2nd, with a day-long series of events.

For additional information on the CHAIN project, AIDS: Play it Smart, or any other World AIDS Day activities, please visit the Westchester County Department of Health website at www.westchestergov.com/health or call the Health Department at (914) 813-5000.