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LSU RECEIVES NEARLY \$400,000 FOR VULNERABLE AND HARD-TO-REACH HIV POPULATIONS

Demonstration project will use health information technology to enhance HIV prevention and care.

Baton Rouge (October 1, 2007) -- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration has awarded the LSU Health Care Services Division (LSU HCSD) a Special Project of National Significance (SPNS) grant of nearly \$400,000 a year to develop an electronic network for medical access for vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations of persons living with HIV (PLWH).

The four-year demonstration project will implement and evaluate a model using health information technology (HIT) to share patient information across health-care providers so that providers can offer appropriate HIV care.

"Timing is critical in the provision of HIV care," said Dr. Michael Kaiser, project program director and acting LSU HCSD chief medical officer. "Early intervention is the key to HIV disease management."

Near and real-time electronic data sharing among network partners can increase the ability of all partners to identify newly diagnosed persons and to reach out to PLWH who may be unaware of their diagnoses or lost to HIV care.

In Louisiana, an estimated 40 percent of PLWH are not in care, including an estimated 6,000 adults with confirmed infection. Also, an estimated 600 HIV-exposed infants have an unconfirmed serostatus, meaning that their mothers are HIV-infected and it is unknown if the infant became infected from the mother. Many of these, or the parents of these infants, are not aware of their HIV status, may not understand or value the benefits of treatment, or may be unable to access care.

At some point, nearly 80 percent of these PLWH have been in a public hospital or clinic since their HIV diagnosis, but medical staff were unaware of the diagnosis. Most received diagnoses outside of the public hospital system.

In Louisiana, nearly 40 percent of those newly identified with HIV develop AIDS within one year, indicating late entry to care. Over 51 percent of PLWH have AIDS diagnoses, and 42 percent of the total number of persons living with HIV/AIDS did not access primary medical care in 2005.

"Information sharing can afford the patient early access to and a continuity of care, it can reduce for the state costs associated with morbidity and mortality due to delayed entry into care, and it can prevent HIV transmissions in both the pediatric and adult populations," Dr. Kaiser said.

LSU HCSD has collaborated with the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) HIV/AIDS Program, the OPH Sexually Transmitted Disease Program, the OPH Tuberculosis Control Program, and the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) to develop an electronic information exchange network, the Louisiana Public Health Information Exchange (LaPHIE), for timely interventions for PLWH and/or syphilis, tuberculosis or co-morbid conditions.

Louisiana ranks second in syphilis, 6th in HIV/AIDS, and tenth in tuberculosis. Silent symptomatology characterizes all three. Timely care can delay or halt HIV progression and cure TB and syphilis. Without treatment, the PLWH can experience rapid progression of TB and/or syphilis.

The SPNS network will consist of the seven LSU HCSD hospitals, the OPH HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted disease and tuberculosis programs, and the LPHI.

The LSU HCSD LaPHIE project team implemented a previous SPNS information technology evaluation of its Lab Tracker HIV Clinical Management and Reporting System. The team showed its ability to evaluate HIT, to document the process, and to disseminate its findings.

The fifth largest public hospital system in the country, the LSU Health Care Services Division is the medical provider for almost 20% of Louisiana's population. It has over 60,000 admissions, 350,000 patient days, 1 million outpatient visits, and over 350,000 emergency department visits. Each year 1700 residents from the LSU and Tulane schools of medicine and Ochsner Health System and 4,000 nurses and allied health students from many colleges and universities are trained in LSU HCSD facilities.

LSU HCSD is the largest single provider of uncompensated inpatient care in Louisiana and provides over 95% of the health care for Louisiana's prisoners. LSU hospitals have an economic impact of over \$1.6 billion in asset business activity, \$918 million in personal earnings, and support over 10,000 jobs.

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