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Besch and Wilcox Receive National HIV/AIDS Awards
Both Instrumental in Re-Establishing Post-Katrina HIV Health Care

Baton Rouge (September 30, 2008) -- Dr. C. Lynn Besch, HIV division director for the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans and statewide clinical lead for the LSU Health Care Services Division (HCSD) HIV Disease Management Program, received the prestigious Gabe Kruks Memorial HIV/AIDS Service Award.

Dr. Ronald Wilcox, program director and principal investigator for the Delta Region AIDS Education and Training Center (AETC) in New Orleans and a staff physician with the LSU HIV Outpatient Program (HOP), received the equally prestigious AIDS Education and Training Centers Award.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration gives the awards annually to those who have exhibited outstanding skill and innovation in implementing the programs and services of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program to improve the lives of those living with HIV/AIDS.

“Dr. Besch’s management, research, and clinical skills are second to none,” said Dr. Michael Kaiser, HCSD acting chief medical officer, who is a cofounder of HOP in New Orleans and the 2006 recipient of the Gabe Kruks award. “She complements these professional skills with a tremendous compassion for her patients and insight into the ramifications of the infection to the person as a whole.”

Dr. Besch has oversight administrative responsibilities for The HOP program, an ambulatory clinic that serves more than 1700 patients a year. The clinic is the largest HIV outpatient clinic in the state and the largest outpatient clinic in the Interim LSU Public Hospital. Since its founding in 1987, it has received national recognition for its pioneering work in HIV care and research and for developing a national model for a comprehensive system of care for people living with HIV.

Dr. Besch’s expertise is widely sought. An advocate for the development and improvement of services for those infected with HIV, she has served on the Governor’s Commission on HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, the Ryan White Part A Regional Planning Council Medical Policy Committee, the state’s HIV/AIDS Part B Program Evaluation Committee, and HOP’s Continuous Quality Improvement Committee.

She has spoken and published widely on HIV/AIDS issues and treatment, is a frequent lecturer for the Delta Region AETC, and has been a featured speaker at the annual consumer conference, Empowerment. She is equally renowned for her work as a clinician. “Patients hold her in high esteem,” said Kathleen Lincoln, HOP program director. “Her approach to care is a partnership based on mutual respect and empathy.”

The depth and breadth of her skills were never more evident than in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“Because of Lynn’s leadership, passion, and vision, the clinic was able to sustain itself during unprecedented and unimaginable circumstances by establishing a HOP clinic in Baton Rouge and locating far-flung staff to provide care,” Lincoln said. “The vision of the HOP clinic as a fully restored center of excellence never left her mind as the clinic moved after the storm from tents, to a temporary building, to the return of the clinic to its Pre-K site in New Orleans.”

The HOP Clinic is restoring its “one-stop shop” option for HIV care. In addition to primary care, HOP offers access to dental, psychiatry, gastroenterology, pulmonology, dermatology, cardiology, nephrology, pain management, and OB/GYN. HOP staff devotes itself to teaching others HIV care and advocacy on the local, state, and national levels for services for the HIV-infected and affected.

Dr. Besch is also an associate professor of clinical medicine, Infectious Diseases Section, in the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans; a clinical associate professor of medicine in the Tulane School of Medicine; and an adjunct associate professor, Department of Epidemiology, in the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

She received the Bachelor of Science degree in medical technology from LSU and her medical degree from the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans, where she completed her general surgical internship, medicine residency, and infectious disease fellowship.

Dr. Ronald Wilcox was instrumental as well in the return of HIV health care and education to the region after Hurricane Katrina. Of particular note was the leadership he exhibited after the storm—he kept the Delta Region AETC alive and active despite the lack of office space and staff who were scattered across the United States.

“After Hurricane Katrina, he was able to create an electronic virtual office that stretched from South Carolina to Louisiana to successfully maintain the AETC operations in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas,” said Brenda Woods-Francis, HRSA public health analyst and HRSA project officer on AIDS Education Training Center grants. “He was able to keep things going in a very difficult situation.”

Post-Katrina, the Delta Region AETC performed the critical task of finding HIV care providers displaced by the storm and many new providers to resume services of those unable to return.

“During the first few weeks after Katrina, Dr. Wilcox traveled throughout Louisiana, offering level II and III training to multiple HIV clinics while waiting to get back to his home,” Woods-Francis said.

The award also recognizes that the Delta Region AIDS Education and Training Center (AETC), under Dr. Wilcox’s direction and with his direct teaching, has a new emphasis on training those who do not yet offer HIV care. The number of people Delta Region AETC has trained post-Katrina has grown by 25 percent. It has also targeted audiences for training, with more outreach to minority providers and primary care providers to increase services for displaced patients.

“Three years after the storm, under the leadership of Dr. Wilcox, the Delta Region AETC has reestablished itself as a premier provider of quality training on HIV/AIDS in the tri-state area,” Woods-Francis said.

In addition to his training and management responsibilities, he maintains a very active clinical practice. From 2002 to 2008, he was the Delta Region AETC medical director.

“He has been a leader within the Delta Region AETC,” Woods-Francis said. “After the hurricane, he began an HIV clinic for pediatric, adolescent, and young adult patients. He became the provider of primary care at a clinic aimed at minority patients with a substance abuse history and HIV.”

Besides his practice at the HOP Clinic, he is an assistant clinical professor in the LSU School of Medicine departments of medicine and pediatrics, co-chair of the HIV Outpatient Program QA/CQI Committee, LSU/HOP/DAETC representative to the statewide HIV Disease Management Initiative, LSU clinical advisor for the development of the LabTracker HIV Electronic Database, and medical director for Family Advocacy, Care, and Education Services.

He has spoken and published widely on HIV and infectious disease, including a book chapter on infectious disease and emergency department diagnosis and management.

Dr. Wilcox received the Bachelor of Arts degree in human biology and the Bachelor of Science degree in respiratory therapy from the University of Kansas (UK) in Lawrence and his medical degree from the UK School of Medicine in Kansas City. While in medical school, he worked as a respiratory therapist in the Menorah Medical Center ICU and in Regency Health Care Facility, caring for chronic ventilator-dependent patients.

He completed a residency in internal medicine, pediatrics, at the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans and received board certification in internal medicine, pediatrics, and infectious diseases. His training also includes a pediatric infectious disease fellowship with Tulane University and the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans and an adult infectious disease fellowship with the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans.

What Drs. Besch and Wilcox received from their medical education at LSU they have returned to Louisiana many times over, and the state is a far better place for it.

The LSU Health System Health Care Services Division is one of the largest public health care delivery systems in the country. It has over 31,000 admissions, 180,000 patient days, 981,000 outpatient visits, and over 270,000 emergency department visits. Each year 1100 residents and fellows from the LSU and Tulane Schools of Medicine and Ochsner Health System and 2,200 nurses and allied health students from many colleges and universities are trained in LSU facilities.

LSU is the largest single provider of uncompensated inpatient care in Louisiana. LSU HCSD hospitals have an economic impact of over \$1.4 billion in asset business activity, \$568 million in personal earnings, and generate over 12,000 jobs.

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