



The Networker

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The Newsletter of the
Rural Aids Action Network

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You can view this newsletter
online at www.raan.org, where
it is in color.

The Rural AIDS Action Network exists to organize, develop and sustain caring communities of professionals and volunteers who serve and support persons living with, affected by, or at risk for HIV/AIDS in the rural Midwest.

Director's Deliberations *Continued Vigilance Needed*

On August 24th of this year the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) released a mid-year analysis of reported HIV cases. They noticed "some trends that, if sustained, would lead to a twenty-four (24) percent increase in the total number of new diagnosed in Minnesota compared to 2008". A deeper analysis of the information highlighted "other concerning trends:"

1. The number of cases diagnosed among adolescents and young adults (ages 15 - 24), both male and female, is up significantly compared to the same time period in 2008 (47 cases versus 24 cases, almost double); and,
2. The number of cases among African-Americans, both male and female, is up 85 percent (46 cases versus 25 cases) compared to the same time period in 2008.

The report does caution that the number of cases may slow down the second half of the year; but they have since released updated information and the trend is continuing.

According to the MDH, adolescents and young adults made up 4% of the population living with HIV/AIDS in 2008. We will not know if the increase in 2009 will be a spike or part of a trend for this population, but either way it is still important to target them for HIV prevention education. One important tool that can be used is Minnesota Statute 121A.23, *Programs to prevent and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and diseases* directs the Commissioner of the Department of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of the Department of Health, to assist districts in developing and implementing a program to prevent and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and diseases, including HIV and HPV. To view the full document, go to www.mnschoolhealth.com (click on HIV).

The Minnesota Department of Health reported African Americans made up 22% of the cases of persons living with HIV/AIDS in the state. In contrast, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the percentage of African-American (Black persons) living in Minnesota at only 4.6% in 2008. It is clear that African Americans are disproportionately affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and so far in 2009 that trend is continuing.

We are somewhat fortunate that Minnesota is a low incident state for HIV infection: 3.8 cases per 100,000 population compared to a rate of 12.4 for the United States as a whole. With that being said; the trends for both young adults and African-Americans should make people pause and consider the potential implications of this information.

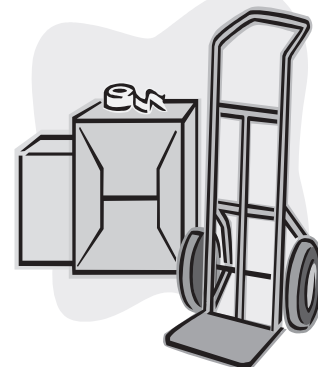
Peace,

Charles C. Kempick

Executive Director

New Office location in Mankato!

RAAN is excited to announce we have moved to a new office location in Mankato. The new office address is 338 Pierce Avenue, North Mankato, MN 56003. The new office space was needed in order to better meet the needs of clients in the southern part of the state. We would like to thank the Mankato Chapter of the American Red Cross for housing us for the past 3 years.



From the Medical Desk – *Fall Season and Flu Season has Started*



Augusto Alonto, MD, RAAN Medical Director

Fall season has started, and so has the influenza season. Influenza (the flu) is a respiratory illness that spreads from person to person. In the United States 5% to 20% of the population become infected and 36,000 people die yearly from flu. The people who are at high risk for complications of the flu are: young children, the elderly, and certain people with chronic health conditions, including HIV.

Unfortunately, this year, it could be worse. As mostly everyone is aware, there is a new flu virus spreading around the world – the H1N1 flu. H1N1 may cause more people to get sick. H1N1 may cause more hospital stays and deaths than the regular seasonal flu.

Symptoms of the flu (seasonal influenza and H1N1) include fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches, and even nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. Complications of the flu can include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and sinus and ear infections. In some cases, it can cause worsening of chronic medical problems, such as heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. People with weak immune system can also experience complications of the flu.

The influenza virus spreads efficiently, mainly from person to person. It is spread through coughing and sneezing. People may also become infected by touching objects (such as shopping cart handles) with flu viruses on it, and then touching their mouth or nose.

There are simple ways to be protected from the flu. Covering your mouth and nose with tissue when you cough or sneeze; washing your hands often with soap and water; avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; and avoiding close contact with sick people, are just simple everyday measures to prevent from being infected.

It is also very important to get the yearly seasonal influenza vaccine. This is the most important step in protecting against the seasonal influenza. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications, including persons with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and HIV. The seasonal influenza vaccine for the 2009 season is now available, so please get yours as soon as possible!

Unfortunately, the seasonal influenza vaccine will not protect us against the H1N1 flu. The US government is working closely with vaccine companies in the process to manufacture a 2009 H1N1 vaccine. The H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available in the fall. At this time, it is recommended that certain groups of the population, including persons with compromised immune systems, receive the vaccine. More information will follow when the H1N1 vaccine becomes available. Call your health care provider for more information regarding the H1N1 vaccine.

Outreach and Education Update

It has been a busy summer and fall at RAAN. We want to take this opportunity to let you know some of our outreach and education activities. We have conducted more than 100 outreach events and more than 300 HIV tests in the first nine months of the year. Here are some highlights.

Pride Events: We had a very busy and enjoyable summer! Outreach and testing were available on a blustery day at the East Central Pride Picnic in Pine City on June 7th. Willmar had its very first Pride Dance on June 12th. Unfortunately we learned of a picnic in Brainerd on June 13th too late to attend, but there is always next year! A festival was held in Fargo-Moorhead on June 20th. Testing was also offered at this event. Lots of staff members and volunteers were on hand for the Twin Cities Pride festival the last weekend of June. On July 11th a Pride Picnic was held in Bemidji. Outreach and testing were offered in Rochester in mid-July. In Duluth-Superior we were graced with an absolutely beautiful day with a space right on the harbor. We did both outreach and testing. Last, but not least, we had a great time with a large turnout at Mankato, with representation at the Fun Run, Festival, and Dance.

Treatment Centers: By state law, chemical dependency treatment centers must offer periodic HIV education. We are pleased to provide group education and person-to-person counseling, testing, and referral at one or more treatment centers in each of our eight regions. We all find it highly rewarding to help people examine their risk behaviors and develop a plan to stay safe while they are attempting such a positive change in their lives.

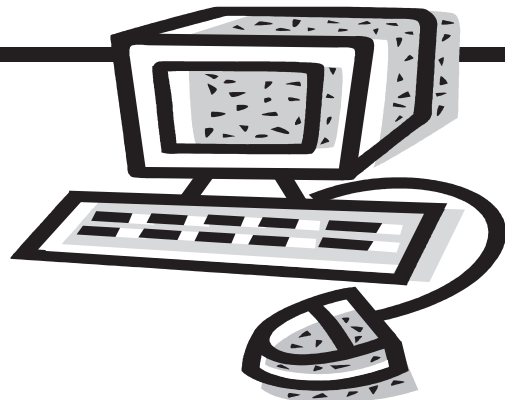
Training for Professionals: We tailor our educational events for professionals depending upon their interests, needs, and prior training. We have offered workplace training for several county social services departments and the Douglas Co. Sheriff's Department. We work with campus health offices and the staff of homeless shelters. We have also presented to several regional housing coalitions. Recently we collaborated with the Midwest AIDS Education and Training Center to offer an HIV Epi Update and Disclosure Workshop to professionals in the counties of East Central and Northeastern Minnesota.

Workshops for Clients: We continue to offer a couple of workshops for our clients and others living with HIV throughout Greater Minnesota. Bob Tracy has been working with us on a consultant basis to lead "Making Sure Your Healthcare is the Best that It can Be". Likewise, Nick Metcalf has been working with us to lead workshops on disclosure. These help clients know what state law demands or allows for disclosure by others as well as what is required and permitted regarding self-disclosure.

Finally, we could not have completed this important work without the help of our volunteers and donors. We thank you all!!

New RAAN website!

RAAN is proud to announce the launch of its new website. Some of the highlights include: client resource list, clinical resource list, interactive service area map as well as news and events. We welcome you to check it out at www.raan.org.





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We need your help in the fight
against HIV in rural MN! Support
RAAN by contributing online
today. www.raan.org

Red Ribbon Ride Recap

Participating in the Red Ribbon Ride in July 2009 was a powerful experience in body, mind and spirit. My body was challenged, rejuvenated and challenged again and again by the ongoing hills throughout southeastern MN. My mind too rolled with the joys of feeling fast and strong to at other times so very cold and weary. As a first time rider, and this year the only rider of the five members of team RAAN, I was overwhelmed by the welcome I received into the community of the RRR. As one experienced rider told me, "You are part of the family now." This instant community felt good and supportive. There were other moments though, of feeling so very alone. I remember how strange it was to feel this way surrounded by so many. In these moments I imagined clients that I serve may often feel this way too. It was powerful. The experience, in the end, was a spiritual one for me. A theme of the ride was "because we can." We ride because we can. We ride for those that can no longer ride. We ride for all those that have come before us. For all these reason, I will ride again. Whether you bike or crew this is an unforgettable experience. Join team RAAN today at www.redribbonride.org and I will see you there. The 2010 Red Ribbon Ride is scheduled for July 15-18.

Peace – Marcy Yarger

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