

KEEP AIDS ON FRONT BURNER, SAYS CDC

New HIV/AIDS awareness campaign to refocus national attention on growing crisis

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

On April 7, officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the White House Domestic Policy Council's Office on AIDS Policy announced a new HIV/AIDS communications and awareness campaign, the first federally-funded national HIV prevention program in more than a decade.

At a cost of \$9 million per year for five years, the Act Against AIDS campaign will bring simple messages of HIV/AIDS prevention to communities across the nation, focusing on specifically-targeted communities at the highest risk of contracting HIV, including African-Americans, Latinos and gay and bisexual men. The first phase of the new campaign will use transit ads, social networking, posters, websites, TV ads and other mass mediums to proclaim "Every 9½ minutes someone in the U.S. is infected with HIV."

The CDC says it is all part of a larger effort to bring national attention back to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"We are here today to address what we believe is a serious threat to the health of our country," Dr. Kevin Fenton, director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, said at the April 7 briefing in Washington, D.C. "That threat is complacency, a false sense of security and a

false sense of calm covering up what remains a serious epidemic."

Fenton said overall concern about HIV in America has declined in recent years.

The Act Against AIDS campaign will reach out to specific target communities starting first with African-Americans. He said African-Americans "bear the greatest burden of HIV/AIDS."

According to Fenton, 1 in 16 black men and 1 in 30 black women will become infected with HIV in their lifetimes. Fenton said working with gay and bisexual men of all races will also be important as those populations "continue to represent the majority of all new HIV infections."

The first targeted efforts with African-American communities will include a leadership initiative with 14 of the leading African-American organizations in the nation, including the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Phi Beta Sigma, the National

Urban League, the National Newspaper Publishers Association and others. The leadership initiative will come at a cost of \$2 million per year for five years.

Dr. Richard Wolitski, the acting director of the CDC's Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention told Q-Notes that the phase targeting gay and bisexual men will start in the summer.

Among the group, higher infection rates were seen among African-American MSM.

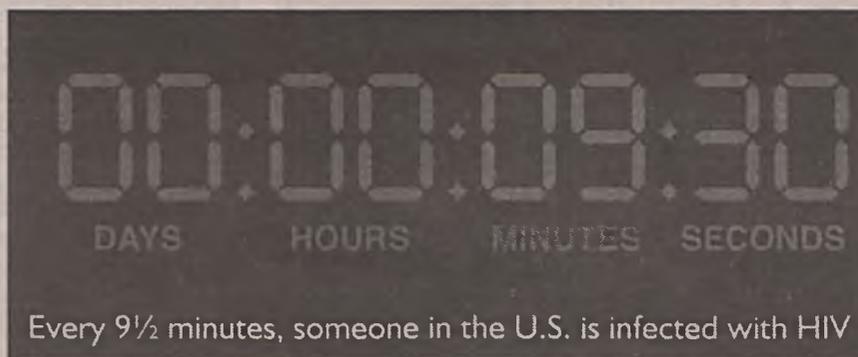
"The vast majority of men have been tested at least once, but unfortunately too many men are not getting tested on a regular basis," Wolitski said of the importance of the campaign's HIV testing awareness. "The CDC recommends that sexually active gay and bisexual men be tested for HIV at least once per year."

Wolitski said the CDC has also experimented with effective ways to reach out to MSM who do not identify as gay or bisexual. He said using the internet as an outreach tool has been one of the most effective strategies; another is similar to Metrolina AIDS Project's D-UP! campaign.

"One of the intervention programs the CDC disseminates nationwide is PROMISE, community level intervention tested with a number of different risk groups including non-gay-identified men," Wolitski said.

"At the same time people assume that gay-identified men have all the information they need, that they've made all the changes that they are going to make," Wolitski warned. "We

see Campaign on 10



"We've been working for a number of months with more than a dozen black gay and bisexual men from around the country to develop a phase of the campaign to be initiated this summer, designed to promote regular HIV testing among gay and bisexual men," he said.

Wolitski said that gay, bisexual and MSM (men who have sex with men) accounted for 53 percent of new HIV infections in 2006.

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