

CDC urges states to collect names for HIV stats

by Lee Strausberg
Special to Q-Notes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued guidelines urging states to track HIV infections (AIDS cases have been tracked since 1981). At the same time the CDC is urging states to track that information with names attached. Dr. Robert Valdiserri, deputy director of the CDC's center for HIV prevention, says reporting names is the best way to ensure the data is accurate and avoids a person being counted multiple times. Names and identifying information are kept at the state level. The CDC is also urging states to pass laws making it a felony to release any of this confidential information. Names are recorded only when the test is done by your family doctor or when having lab work done that goes on your medical record. States that do not comply face losing federal funding for HIV Surveillance.

Ohio has tracked HIV with names since 1990. Jay Carey, Public Information Officer for the Ohio Department of Health, says Ohio has not had a breach of confidentiality in the 10 years they've tracked HIV with names. "Confidentiality is extremely important here. Newly hired people are taught about confidentiality immediately. They know releasing information would result in termination of employment. The department is so strict even physicians can not gain information about their own clients," says Elizabeth Cross, supervisor of the HIV/AIDS Surveillance Program at the Ohio Department of Health. "There is no reason for anyone to not be tested." For those still afraid, all but 11 states still allow anonymous testing.

[Editor's note: Even in those states that require names, many do not verify their accuracy or authenticity.]

Other HIV-related discoveries also made headlines recently: Among them, Dr. Robert Stout, president of Clinical Reference Laboratory, recently announced a new urine test for HIV antibodies is showing that two to three times more people may be carrying HIV in their urinary tracts who have no signs of HIV in their blood. The question is now whether these people have the ability to stop the infections in the mucous membranes preventing a widespread infection and whether or not these people could be spreading the virus to others even though their blood tests says they are HIV negative.

Also, The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) recently announced any home HIV test other than the FDA-approved "Home Access Express HIV-1 Test System" can give inaccurate results and is urging Americans to get tested with an approved test as soon as possible. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced Cyberlinx and its president, Jeffrey S. Stein, have agreed to stop marketing their "EZ Med Test" home HIV kit and will turn over all monies collected from customers for the tests to the FTC. They are now banned for life from marketing home HIV test kits and if they ever want to market any type of medical device they must first post a \$500,000 bond each.

On the legal front, Hawaii recently approved the medical use of marijuana. Patients suffering from chronic pain from debilitating diseases such as cancer and AIDS may now possess up to three ounces of Marijuana and grow up to seven plants for their personal use only. Hawaii requires that the patient be registered by a physician in order to use Marijuana legally. Hawaii is the tenth state to legalize Marijuana for medical use.

In other notable health news, help may be on the horizon for patients with severe debilitating depression that does not respond well to antidepressants or therapy. Dr. Robert H. Howland, psychiatrist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, and Dr. David

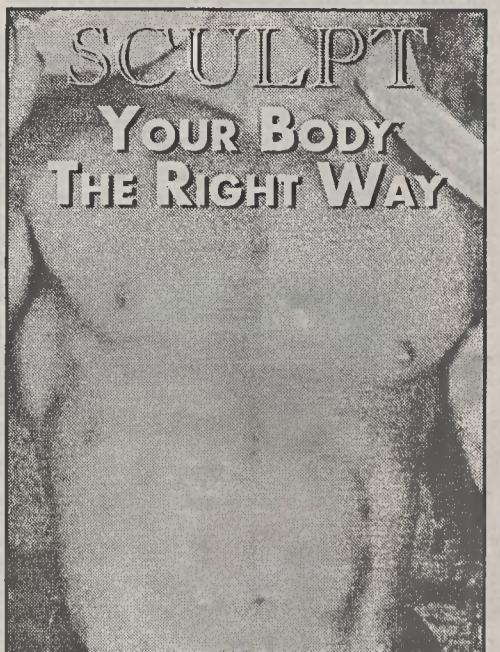
Adelson, Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Pittsburgh, are currently testing a small device that looks and works similarly to a cardiac pacemaker. The stimulator is placed in the patient's chest and wires are run to the vagus nerve near the carotid artery in the patient's neck. This nerve reaches the limbic system, which controls emotions. Shocks from the stimulator last approximately 30 seconds and occur every three to five minutes. Approved in 1997, this device is currently used to treat patients with debilitating epileptic seizures.

The CDC reports antibiotic-resistant infections in hospitalized patients rose 64 percent in just three years. "The key finding is that we discovered strains that were already resistant to one drug were picking up additional resistance to other antibiotics," said Dr. Cynthia Whitney of the CDC. Inappropriate use of antibiotics is largely to blame for "teaching" these superbugs how to resist more and more antibiotics. Unfortunately, many hospitals are now being forced to cut infection-control programs due to decreasing revenues, which only adds to the problem.

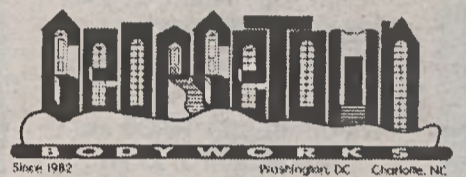
Infectious disease specialist Dr. Joe Plouffe says, while he is seeing a rise in hospital-acquired antibiotic-resistant infections, it is not as drastic as what the CDC is finding. Dr. Plouffe says the majority of resistant bacteria he encounters are usually found in patients that have endured surgery followed by lengthy, complicated hospital stays, such as organ transplant patients. "These resistant bacteria are not infecting the general population...yet" says Dr. Plouffe, "The point here is that we need to stop the unnecessary use of antibiotics".

And Ephedra, or Ma Huang — frequently used as an ingredient in many club drugs — has been linked to serious side effects such as heart attacks, strokes and even death. Ephedra's active ingredient, ephedrine, is used in various products to treat bronchial and respiratory conditions and to stimulate the heart. ▼

[We will continue to bring you other important news as it occurs on HIV-related issues. Remember: We have not won the battle yet!]



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