

Forum works for living wage U.S. to face shortage of influenza vaccinations

BY AL KILLEFFER
STAFF WRITER

Representatives of state employees crowded around a horseshoe of tables Wednesday morning in anticipation of a special presentation about the living wage campaign.

During this month's meeting of the Employee Forum, guest speaker Sorien Schmidt of the North Carolina Justice Center spoke at length about the concept of the living wage.

She worked to clarify much of the confusion that often surrounds this topic for delegates from nine different divisions of campuswide state employees.

Schmidt emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the federal poverty level and the living income standard.

The standard takes into account

many things the federal poverty level does not. For example, estimates are based on a family's income after taxes rather than on its gross income.

As a result of these differences, the standard acts as a much more realistic gauge to determine whether or not a family is impoverished, Schmidt said.

The average statewide living wage is \$10.60 per hour, according to a study conducted by Schmidt and her associates.

The study also yielded some shocking results.

"Sixty percent of families in the state aren't earning a living income," Schmidt said.

Originally created in the 1960's, the federal poverty level was intended to act as a baseline under which a family could not economically sustain itself.

Schmidt's handout stated that it was never supposed to "measure an adequate income."

Schmidt said that the federal poverty level is tremendously outdated and inaccurate and that there is a need to use the new, more reliable benchmark for poverty — the living income standard.

The Employee Forum has achieved some success in its efforts to win a living wage for state employees at the University and across North Carolina, said forum Chairman Tommy Griffin.

During its last session, the N.C. General Assembly passed a bill granting a one-time pay raise of \$1,000 or 2.5 percent, whichever was greater, to all state employees.

The flat raise increase marked a huge step for state workers and was initiated in part by the Employee Forum, Schmidt said.

Griffin said he already has plans to return to the legislature this year to push for even more significant wage increases.

Using this approach, the Employee Forum eventually could win a living wage, Schmidt said.

"If the state legislature continued to pass substantial, flat pay raise increases, you could solve the problem."

Contact the University Editor at uodesk@unc.edu.

BY ASHLEY HART
STAFF WRITER

Before the start of flu season, the United States has lost half of its vaccine supply to possible contamination.

A regulatory agency suspended Chiron Corporation's Fluvirin influenza vaccine production license for three months on Tuesday, preventing the shipment of 46 to 48 million doses of the flu vaccine to the United States.

The suspension, administered by Britain's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, resulted from problems at Chiron's factory in Liverpool, England, where the company produces its largest amount of Fluvirin.

"The suspension was imposed as a result of Chiron's failure to comply with the requirements of good manufacturing practices, leading to concerns of possible microbial contamination of the product," stated an MHRA press release.

Chiron faced a similar problem in August, when four million doses of the flu vaccine were found to be contaminated.

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

press release, 54 million vaccines still will be available to the United States from Aventis Pasteur Inc. One million additional vaccines will be available to people between the ages of five and 49 through MedImmune Inc.'s FluMist.

North Carolina has received 147,000 vaccines from Aventis so far this year and is expected to get 339,000 doses overall before the end of flu season.

One CDC plan to combat the vaccine shortage is to alter the distribution of doses in order to reach those who need them most.

A CDC spokeswoman said that young children and the elderly, along with people who have underlying chronic health problems, pregnant women, nursing home residents and health care officials, will have priority.

The Food and Drug Administration and National Institutes of Health are testing a dilution of the vaccines to create two doses out of one initial dose.

A similar shortage arose in 2000

when there were low-production yields for two vaccine-producing companies.

According to the FDA, no serious shortage occurred because 75 million doses of the vaccine were still distributed.

Despite these national concerns, a shortage is not likely to occur at UNC Hospitals.

"The supply we get does not come from the company whose supply was pulled," said Stephanie Crayton, media relations manager for UNC Health Care. "We have a supply, and the state is working with us to see how to use (the vaccines)."

The flu virus kills an average of 36,000 people per year while sending an additional 114,000 to the hospital.

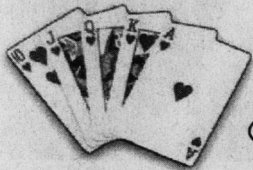
Student Health Services will administer flu vaccinations in October and November, around the same time North Carolina's flu season started last year.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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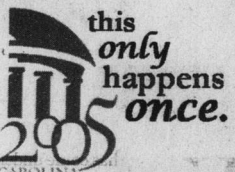
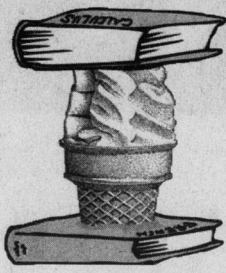
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