

Routine HIV Testing Program at Ben Taub Hospital Celebrates Anniversary



Staff from the emergency center at Ben Taub General Hospital celebrates the first year anniversary of a trendsetting program to make HIV testing a routine procedure in ERs. The group shows off a commemorative cake for the Aug. 4 occasion.

HOUSTON (Aug. 13, 2009) – The new routine HIV screening program for emergency patients at Ben Taub General Hospital celebrated its one-year anniversary on Aug. 4. In its first year, the program has screened more than 25,800 people, resulting in 178 newly diagnosed HIV-positive cases.

The new cases represent a .65 positive rate. That rate is more than six times greater than what the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends a program must show to warrant its continuation. Also in its first year, the testing program reconfirmed the HIV status of 323 people who had not sought care for the virus.

The success of the program, Routine Universal Screening for HIV, places the Harris County Hospital District at the forefront of a nationwide effort to make the screening for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, a routine test for all patients.

HCHD began testing all patients, ages 18-64, who arrive in Ben Taub's emergency center and require blood lab work. The hospital district hopes to make the HIV test as common as a test for cholesterol or glucose levels. A key feature of HCHD's program is its ability to refer newly diagnosed HIV-positive patients and reconfirmed patients to primary care and other supportive services at Thomas Street Health Center, its free-standing HIV/AIDS facility.

“To ensure this linkage is timely and effective, the program administers and processes testing within two hours,” said Ken Malone, HIV Testing Project Coordinator. “Trained HIV counselors are notified when a positive test is reported, and they meet directly with the patient to inform of test results, provide appropriate education and counseling, and assist with making an appointment for follow-up care at Thomas Street.”

Because of Ben Taub’s success, HCHD has expanded its routine HIV testing program to Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, with plans to expand to its other 12 community health centers.