At the end of June, SUNY Downstate’s HIV Center hosted three South African faculty members as part of its twinning partnership with the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Christo Heunis, PhD, Nandi Jacobs, MS, and Hannes van Biljon, MS of the Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CHSR&D) are engaged in conducting behavioral research on HIV and TB prevention and care in the province of the Free State. Their trip to the US included training in epidemiology, biostatistics, and data management at the Johns Hopkins Summer Institute in Baltimore, and further technical assistance and education planning at SUNY Downstate. The focus of the partnership is to strengthen the capacity of CHSR&D faculty to manage research projects that inform HIV and TB healthcare practice and policy in South Africa.

The HIV Center at SUNY Downstate (DeHovitz, PI) was awarded this twinning partnership grant by the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) through a cooperative agreement with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services; these activities have been funded as part of the implementation of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which recently received congressional reauthorization.

On July 7, Dr. Heunis addressed the Downstate campus at a special lunch seminar. He described the Free State as a largely rural area with a population of 2.9 million and an estimated HIV seroprevalence rate of 31%, the third highest rate of all the provinces in South Africa. South Africa also has the highest TB incidence in the world, and has one of the lowest global TB cure rates. To confront this challenge, CHSR&D currently conducts research on integrating HIV and TB services, such as increasing the uptake of HIV counseling and testing in the TB populations.

Through our inter-institutional relationship, Downstate will continue to provide technical assistance to assist CHSR&D staff; in November, selected Downstate faculty will travel to South Africa to conduct further training to enhance the University of the Free State’s research projects.
Brian Edlin, MD, FIDSA, will participate in the 48th Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy (ICAAC)/46th Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) Annual Meeting. It will be held at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC, from October 25-28. Dr. Edlin will serve as a Convener in an interactive symposium on hepatitis C management.

Taryn Aulicino, BS, MT, is the STAR Program’s new Clinical Trials Coordinator. She has a Bachelor of Science in Medical Technology from Wagner College, and spent the last 25 years at Downstate’s Division of Infectious Diseases as a Clinical Research Technologist. She has also worked as a Clinical Microbiology Laboratory Technologist (Department of Pathology) as well as an Infection Control Surveillance Officer (Department of Infection Control) at The University of Medicine and Dentistry in Newark, NJ.

Nedda Black, MSW, joined the STAR Program as Trauma Counselor. Ms. Black has a Master of Social Work from New York University, and brings a significant history of trauma work as a rape counselor and advocate for sexual assault survivors.

Michael Carden has joined the STAR Program has a Project Director. He has dual Masters Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and Substance Abuse Counseling from East Carolina University and received his clinical training at the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto. He has worked with Dr. Brian Edlin at the Center for the Study of Hepatitis C at Weill Cornell Medical College for the past four years, where he directed an innovative project that treated active drug users with hepatitis C using an integrated, multidisciplinary care model, in collaboration with several needle exchange programs.

Garry Graham, MA, MPH, travelled to Valley View University in Accra, Ghana in July 2008, to conduct a presentation on “The HIV Pandemic and its African Ties.” He will present on “Ten Ways Churches Can Combat HIV/AIDS in Hispanic Communities” at the 136th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA), to be held in San Diego, CA in late October.

Eddie Meraz, ANP and Neha Shah, MD are the new HIV clinical scholars for the 2008-2010 program period. Mr. Meraz, a recent graduate of the Yale School of Nursing, has an interest in men’s health issues and will be preceptoring with many of the STAR clinicians in the next few months. He is a family nurse practitioner with a Master of Science in Nursing from Yale University and a Bachelor of Arts (Majors: Sociology and Spanish) from Gonzaga University. Dr. Shah is an ID fellow/HIV clinical scholar. She has a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology from Emory University, and received her MD from St. George’s University in 2005.

Richelyne Nemorin is the HEAT Program’s new HIV Test Counselor. Prior to joining HEAT, Ms. Nemorin was a Brookdale University Hospital Treatment for Life Center social worker intern and a Case Manager Technician at the Church Avenue Merchants Block Association (CAMBA).

Jesi Ramone, MD has rejoined the STAR Health Center (SHC) as an attending physician. Dr. Ramone was a SHC provider until December 2006, when he left STAR to join Abbott Labs.

Christina Sferruzzo, MS, joined the STAR Program as an administrative coordinator for Dr. Brian Edlin. She has a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education from Brooklyn College. In addition, Ms. Sferruzzo has nearly 19 years of experience in grant and research administration with The Research Foundation of CUNY (Brooklyn College Campus).

Maria Shu, MPH, joined the STAR Program as Project Director of the SWAN Project (Edlin, PI), a position she has held since August of 2004 at the Center for the Study of Hepatitis C at Weill Cornell Medical College. She received her MPH in Epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health and her Bachelor of Arts at Oberlin College. Her previous work experience includes epidemiologic research at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the HIV Epidemiology Division, as well as training in molecular biology, virology, and immunology at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and The Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio.

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The HEAT Program (Birnbaum, PI) received several grant awards, including: 1) a renewal of its NYS Department of Health AIDS Institute Specialized Care Center grant in the amount of $477,268 to provide medical, case management, mental health, treatment adherence and transition services to HIV+ youth; 2) a one-time Ryan White Part B grant of $200,000 from the NYS Department of Health AIDS Institute for its Youth Specialized Care Center to provide medical, case management, mental health, treatment adherence and transition services to HIV+ youth; 3) $665,755 over five years from the NYS Department of Health, Bureau of Child and Adolescent Health, to provide “Health and Human Services for LGBT Individuals, Families and Communities;” 4) a one-time first year $60,000 supplemental grant to provide outreach, prevention education, case management, support groups and life skills to LGBT youth of color in Brooklyn as a way to engage and link them to healthcare services; and 5) a Rose M. Badgeley Charitable Trust (via HSBC Bank USA) award of $5,000 for general operating support.
The Infant and Child Learning Center had a dedication of their new center at 670 Parkside Avenue on June 13. The new facility will house 5 classrooms, a gym, an evaluation center, administrative offices, a kitchen, dining room and a rooftop playground. ICLC provides services for children with disabilities as well as typically developing children in our new daycare. Reverend Sharon Codner-Walker, Director of Pastoral Care for University Hospital of Brooklyn, Father Oduro and Rabbi Holzman said prayers and blessed the center.

all on hand to extend their best wishes for the new center.

PUBLICATIONS


HEAT and FACES Programs Sponsor Safer Sex Party

The HEAT and FACES Programs sponsored a “Schools Out” safer sex party on June 20th at The Lab in Brooklyn. HEAT sponsors large quarterly safer sex parties at clubs in Brooklyn where HIV counseling and testing is promoted and various incentives are provided, such as a DJ, refreshments, flavored condoms and lubricants, dental dams, T-shirts, bags and hats, raffles, dance contests, and door prizes. This approach taps into our HIV+ patients’ social networks and offers a non-threatening opportunity for HIV+ youth to bring their sexual partners to be tested. In addition, youth agencies set up resource tables and HEAT distributed literature and condom packs to youth. HEAT provided HIV counseling and testing to 99 youth and identified one positive.

Dine and Learn Healthy Youth Symposium

On May 9, 2008, the HEAT Program and Teens Helping Each Other (THEO) participated in the 3rd Annual “Dine & Learn Healthy Youth Symposium,” sponsored by SUNY Downstate at Clara Barton High School for Health Professionals. This year’s theme was “Play Safe, Play Healthy or Get Played!” Over 500 youth attended the event and participated in various health presentations facilitated by Downstate medical staff. HEAT tabled, distributed literature and condoms, and provided HIV counseling and testing to 77 youth at the event. THEO participated in their HIV Awareness Fashion Show, distributed literature and condoms, and provided HIV counseling and testing in conjunction with the HEAT Program.

New HEAT Program Website

The HEAT Program has launched a new website (www.heatprogram.org) to provide information for youth, service providers and funders.

HEAT Program Featured in Daily News

The HEAT Program was featured in the Brooklyn section of the Daily News on August 5 for its efforts in providing prevention education and outreach to youth in Brooklyn to raise awareness about the growing problem of HIV/AIDS in this population. The article focused on how HEAT youth outreach to other youth and distribute safe sex materials, literature and information about HEAT’s services. The Daily News interviewed several of HEAT’s youth outreach workers and shadowed HEAT taking pictures at the annual Coney Island beach outreach event on July 25, 2008. Several HEAT youth and staff were quoted in the article and there were pictures of staff conducting outreach.

THEO Attends “ACT for Youth Retreat” at Cornell University

Anthony Thompson, AS, Teens Helping Each Other (THEO) Outreach Specialist, and 3 peer educators attended the “ACT for Youth Retreat” at Cornell University in July 2008. This retreat was an intensive 4-day focus group focusing on HIV/AIDS, as well as health and social issues faced by children and adolescents worldwide. THEO peer educators engaged in team-building activities during the day and in the evening engaged in focus groups on topics related to future community health and prevention.