On Tuesday, December 1, 2009, SUNY Downstate commemorated a quarter century in the fight against HIV/AIDS with a special World AIDS Day program. The program, entitled “A Quarter Century of HIV Care, Prevention and Research,” featured opening remarks by John C. LaRosa, MD, SUNY Downstate’s President, who noted “as part of Downstate’s 150th anniversary celebrations, we thought it fitting on World AIDS Day to look at what Downstate has accomplished in the fight against HIV/AIDS.” Kathy Powderly, CNM, PhD, Acting Director of Downstate’s Division of Humanities in Medicine, provided an introduction to the event and to Ron Bayer, PhD, an expert on medical ethics in the treatment of AIDS and Professor, Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Dr. Bayer spoke about the first 25 years of the AIDS epidemic and moderated a panel discussion featuring Downstate healthcare professionals. Panelists included: Jeffrey Birnbaum, MD, MPH; Jack A. DeHovitz, MD, MPH; Joan Hittelman, PhD; Susan Holman, RN, MS; Sheldon Landesman, MD, FACP; Hermann Mendez, MD; and Howard Minkoff, MD. Each discussed their experiences delivering HIV/AIDS care over the past quarter century.

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Other distinguished speakers included M. Monica Sweeney, MD, MPH, assistant commissioner for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Ivo Lorenz, PhD, Principal Scientist, Immunogen Design, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), who discussed efforts to create an AIDS vaccine; and the Reverend Dr. Paul Smith, vice chairperson at the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health, who provided reflections and the benediction. Portions of the AIDS Memorial Quilt were exhibited at the entrance to the Alumni Auditorium.

In the 1980s, SUNY Downstate developed one of the first dedicated multi-disciplinary AIDS programs integrating clinical, psychosocial, and educational services. By combining such disciplines as infectious disease, gynecology, and pediatrics, Downstate was among the first to focus on HIV transmission from mother to child. Before effective medication was available, Downstate identified the importance of Cesarean birth to reduce the chance of perinatal HIV transmission. (Later, studies found that zidovudine [AZT] dramatically reduced the risk of mother-to-child transmission). Perinatal transmission rates were high, and there were large numbers of children with developmental disabilities caused by HIV infection. In response to the growing need for therapeutic intervention, Downstate’s Infant and Child Learning Center provided the first early intervention and preschool special education program dedicated to providing education and therapy for children with HIV infection, including hospital-based, home-based, and center-based programs. In 1993, Downstate’s investigators founded the HIV Center for Women and Children, combining research, primary care, and community outreach. Research conducted by SUNY Downstate was used by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to refine the definition of AIDS in women.

Today, the HIV Center serves more than 2,000 men, women, and children through a wide variety of services. Each year, the HIV Center receives more than $15 million in extramural funding to support its varied research and service activities. In recent years, Downstate investigators have researched a multitude of HIV-related issues, such as hepatitis C, drug use, treatment adherence, prevention, and neurocognitive changes. The HIV Center is also involved in a number of international projects. Since 1993, Downstate has provided HIV training for professionals from Central and Eastern Europe. In 2007, the HIV Center was awarded a Twinning Partnership to enhance HIV research capacity with the University of the Free State in South Africa. The HIV Center has hosted delegations of physicians and care providers from Georgia, Grenada, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, and Trinidad and Tobago. Downstate also has a long history of collaboration with other organizations involved in the HIV epidemic. Downstate partnered with the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health, established in 1992 to develop programs to improve health care delivery in urban America, including HIV prevention. Downstate also collaborates with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

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FACULTY AND STAFF

UPDATES

Ismaila Bello, MD, has joined the STAR Program as the new Empire Clinical Research Investigator Program (ECRIP) fellow. Dr. Bello is a graduate of the University of Lagos College of Medicine and has just recently completed his three-year residency in medicine at The Brooklyn Hospital Center. He will provide cardiology consultation services in the STAR Health Center and work with Dr. Jason Lazar on WHS-realted research studies through June 2011.

Lori Hurley, LMSW, joined the STAR Program’s behavioral health program as a Clinical Support Counselor. Ms. Hurley has a Master of Public Health from Columbia University and a Master of Social Work from Adelphi University. She has an extensive background in clinical social work, having worked in several HIV-connected community-based organizations, the most recent being CAMBA. She will provide Seeking Safety treatment to our patients dealing with active substance use and/or trauma.

Rachael Morgan Peters, MPH, LMSW, joined the FACES Network as Program Coordinator of the Peer Outreach Worker Entry and Retention (POWER) Program. A new project for FACES, POWER pairs peer outreach workers with case managers to increase the engagement and retention of women of color who are HIV positive. Ms. Peters completed Master’s Degrees in Public Health and Social Work at Columbia University. She previously worked as the director of a sexual health peer education program in Brooklyn.

Tonya N. Taylor, PhD, MS is a postdoctoral fellow in the STAR Program and is working with Dr. Tracey E. Wilson to implement two CDC-funded studies during her fellowship (The Barbershop as Behavioral Settings for HIV Prevention Targeting African American Heterosexual Men, Phase 1 (Formative Research) and the Increasing retention in care among patients being treated for HIV infection: Intervention Trials to Retain HIV-Positive Patients in Medical Care Dr. Taylor received a joint PhD in Anthropology and Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. Her intellectual interests range across medical and linguistic anthropology, with a focus on treatment- and health-seeking behaviors and a geographic concentration in Southern and Eastern Africa.

Josephine Walker, MSA, rejoined SUNY Downstate as Case Manager for the Family, Adolescent and Children’s Experience at SUNY (FACES) Program. Ms. Walker has a Master of Science from California College for Health Sciences and is currently enrolled in a RN program at LaGuardia Community College. Her last position was at Sibley Hospital in Washington, DC, where she was the program director for the Alzheimer’s Memory Disorder-Assisted Living program.
The HIV Center is now distributing the HIV Link electronically. If you are interested in remaining on our mailing list, please send your email address, along with your name and mailing address, to hivcenter@downstate.edu


