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LUTHERAN HEALTHCARE MAKES HUGE LEAP FORWARD IN HIV SCREENING

LFHC incorporates HIV rapid testing during routine dental visits

October 9, 2008, Brooklyn, New York...Beginning in mid October, Lutheran Family Health Centers (one of the largest federally qualified community health networks in the nation) will incorporate HIV rapid testing during routine dental visits.

“This marks a giant leap forward for dental care and HIV testing,” says Larry K. McReynolds, executive director, Lutheran Family Health Centers. “By including HIV rapid testing in a routine dental diagnostic visit, we are helping an entirely new population of people learn their status.”

In an effort to de-stigmatize the act of getting tested, while also encouraging Americans to "know their status," the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has made the recommendation that all individuals aged 13 to 64 get tested.

In March of last year, the LFHC network received a Special Projects of National Significance grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HRSA) to study oral health of HIV patients, and to study and implement rapid testing in dental care in locations in the U.S. Virgin Islands, New York and Arizona.

Screening for the HIV antibodies with the rapid oral test initially requires only a simple swab of the gums. If initially positive, it will be followed up by a confirmatory blood test. The test provides preliminary results within 20 minutes and is 98 percent accurate. A person can be infected with HIV but it could take as many as 10 years before they begin to show symptoms, which is why it is important for everyone to get tested and to "know their status.”

Lutheran’s work in the AIDS community is extensive. The Lutheran Family Health Centers have been committed to educating and serving HIV positive and those at-risk in Brooklyn communities for 20 years. In 1988, Lutheran’s Special Care Immunology Services Program was named a N.Y.S. Department of Health Designated HIV/AIDS Center. In 2003, Lutheran was the recipient of HRSA’s first “US/Caribbean HIV/AIDS Twinning Collaborative” award to form a bi-lateral relationship to improve AIDS care in the Caribbean and the United States. In 2007, through community outreach and outpatients visits, the Lutheran HealthCare network provided 4,583 rapid HIV tests in Brooklyn.

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The Lutheran Family Health Centers (LFHC), based in Sunset Park, is a federally qualified community-based ambulatory health care system affiliated with Lutheran HealthCare. Governed by the Sunset Park Health Council, Inc., and serving southwest Brooklyn, LFHC is one of the largest health center networks in the country. With nine full-time community health centers, eight medical partnerships, 14 school-based health centers and community programs, including three WIC programs, adult and family literacy programs, three child care centers and a family wellness center, the network has served as Brooklyn’s medical home for more than 40 years.