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Office of Women's Health



Celebrating the Mind, Body, Spirit & Diversity of Women

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March 2008

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National and Local Efforts Underway to Eliminate Health Disparities

Shortfalls in health take years off the lives of all Americans and hurt our nation's economy according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation which announced a non-partisan Commission to identify and recommend practical solutions to eliminate health disparities and improve health for all Americans.

The Foundation will detail the stark differences in health among Americans and how social factors such as education, income, race and ethnicity, and environment affect how long and how well people live.

The Commission to Build a Healthier America is the first national, consensus-seeking group to consider solutions outside the medical care system for improving health.

A comprehensive report will be released detailing differences in health, how social factors contribute to these differences, and how they impact America's economic strength.

Public Health establishes Health Equity Workgroup
To examine health disparities on a local level, the L.A. County Department of Public Health has created

a Health Equity Workgroup. Headed by Paul Simon, MD, MPH, Director of the Division of Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, the workgroup will develop recommendations and a concise action plan on how the department can increase its effectiveness in reducing health disparities.

The focus is on the adverse social, economic, and environmental conditions that constitute the underlying causes of these disparities and potential roles for Public Health.

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Early Detection of Colorectal Cancer can save your life

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon and/or the rectum. For most cases, colorectal cancer develops over the course of several years by starting as a simple growth of tissue (also known as a polyp) in the lining of the colon or rectum.

With colorectal cancer screening, these polyps can be detected early and removed.

However, screening rates overall are very low for women in Los Angeles County (60%) compared with rates of other preventive screening tests such as mammography and Pap tests.

Ethnic Disparities

Asian/Pacific Islander women have the lowest screening rates (53%) while African American women have the highest (70%). Despite this higher screening rate, African American women have the highest mortality rate for colorectal cancer compared to other ethnic groups. Also striking is the very low screening rate (32%) for women without health insurance.

It is very important to spread awareness of this disease, including its risk factors as well as ways to help prevent it and detect it early.

Risk Factors & Prevention

Many factors have been found to increase the risk of colorectal cancer. The risk factors that can be modified include: smoking, poor diet and little exercise, being overweight, alcohol intake and having diabetes. There are many preventive strategies which include: a good diet with plenty of grains, exercise, vitamins (particularly vitamin D), limiting alcohol intake, not smoking and, of course, getting checked. There are several different screening tests that can be used to find colorectal cancer early. Consult your health care provider about which screening test is right for you.

OWH Mission

To improve the health status of women in Los Angeles County by providing education and promoting resources, programs and policies that are helpful and responsive to women, and increasing access to culturally competent, comprehensive health services.

January ~ Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Preventing Cervical Cancer - The HPV Vaccine

Cervical cancer caused approximately 3,670 deaths and 11,150 women were diagnosed with the disease in the United States in 2007. Although many strides have been made in reducing the incidence and mortality of cervical cancer, certain populations remain at high risk for the cancer.

Now, we have a new weapon in our fight against this disease.

On June 8, 2006, the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first vaccine against the Human Papillomavirus (HPV).

HPV causes over 99% of cervical cancer and is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States.

More than 20 million men

and women are currently infected with HPV and there are 6.2 million new infections each year.

The HPV vaccine is effective against two types of HPV (HPV 16 and 18) that cause over 70% of cervical cancer cases. In addition, the vaccine covers HPV types 6 and 11 that cause 90% of genital warts.

The FDA has approved the vaccine to be given to women ages 9 to 26 years as this is the age group that the vaccine was tested in and found to be safe and effective.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices has recommended that all girls ages 11 and 12 years routinely receive the vaccine.

The vaccine, most effective before the onset of sexually activity, is given in a series of 3 injections over a six month period and can be given with other vaccines.

The FDA has found that the vaccine is safe and effective based on studies conducted in thousands of women around the world; however, studies are ongoing to determine long term safety and whether a booster injection will be needed to maintain the immunity afforded by the vaccine.

Although the HPV vaccine is an important medical breakthrough representing a significant advance in women's health and the fight against cervical cancer, it will not replace other prevention strategies currently used for cervical cancer.

Women will continue to require the Pap test since only 70% of cervical cancers will be prevented by the vaccine.

In addition, the vaccine is being tested in men to determine if including them in the vaccination efforts will help further reduce HPV infection in the public.

The vaccine is currently available in Los Angeles County.

HPV is the most common sexually-transmitted infection in the U.S.

Women will continue to need a Pap test as only 70% of cervical cancers are prevented by the HPV vaccine.

For more information on HPV or the vaccine, please see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/default.htm>

Ask The Doctor...

How do I know if I have the human papillomavirus (HPV) infection?



Rita Singhal, MD, MPH
OWH Medical Director

If you have a question for Ask the Doctor, please submit it to jstjohn@ph.lacounty.gov

HPV is an infection that is transmitted through sexual contact. Most HPV infections do not cause any symptoms so people who have it will not know they are infected.

At least 50% of the sexually active population in the United States will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives. Most of these infections go away on their own; however in some cases they persist and lead

to health conditions such as genital warts, pre-cancerous changes or cancer of the cervix, vagina or vulva.

There is no test to detect HPV infection in men. Women can get Pap tests and a specialized HPV DNA test to find pre-cancerous changes in the cervix before cervical cancer develops.

If you are 21 years of age or older or have been sexually active for at least 3 years,

see your health care provider to get a Pap test.

For low-income women in LA County, free Pap tests are available by calling the OWH Appointment hotline—1-800-793-8090.

Operators speaking English, Spanish, Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin and Vietnamese are available to make appointments at one of over 100 partner clinics.



Spotlight on our Community Partners National Cervical Cancer Coalition



The National Cervical Cancer Coalition (NCCC) was founded in 1996 by Randi and Alan Kaye out of the need for quality cervical cancer screening for underserved, uninsured women.

A grassroots nonprofit organization that began in Los Angeles County, the NCCC has grown to 4,500 members worldwide.

The NCCC maintains a continuous support system for women, family members and friends facing issues related to cervical cancer, HPV and other HPV-related cancers. They provide a plethora of resources on their award-winning website, and they created the nation's first Cervical Cancer Phone Lifeline for women and

family members, and the Phone Pals support system which matches together women who are battling cervical cancer and HPV infections.

NCCC also advocates for patient access to quality care, regular testing and vaccination to prevent cervical cancer/ HPV disease.

One important facet of their advocacy is to educate the public and erase the stigma that incorrectly links the disease to promiscuous behavior. Although

HPV is sexually-transmitted, it is almost as common as a cold virus and in most cases goes away on its own. A regular Pap test is necessary to make sure of that.

Patty Juric, a cervical cancer survivor who now volunteers with the NCCC, was glad she had a Pap test but because of the stigma was afraid to tell her parents that she was diagnosed with early stage cervical cancer and needed surgery.

Says Patty: "I didn't know what their reaction would be, so I put off calling them until the night before. My mom just lost it and had to hang up the phone. She didn't realize it wasn't a death sentence, that there

Cervical cancer isn't a death sentence...there is hope.

was hope. And later when she found out it was caused by a sexually-transmitted disease, she gave me a dirty look because she didn't know the facts then."

The NCCC is committed to providing exceptional advocacy, education and support services for women with or at risk for cervical cancer and HPV infection.

The OWH has been proud to display the beautiful Cervical Cancer Signature Quilts, made by women who have been touched by cancer, that the NCCC makes available to women's groups and health care conferences. The quilts put a personal face on the battle against cervical cancer and highlight the need for education, outreach efforts and early detection.

For more information on the National Cervical Cancer Coalition, visit their website: nccc-online.org.

January ~ Cervical Cancer Awareness Month



Supervisor Burke presents Alan Kaye with a scroll in recognition of the excellent work of the National Cervical Cancer Coalition.

Also pictured (l to r) is Dr. Jonathan Fielding, Director of Public Health, Ellen Eidem, OWH Director, Patty Juric and Rachel Biety, NCCC, and Jessica St. John, OWH.

**"At the moment of commitment,
the universe conspires to assist you."**

~ Goethe ~

OWH Speakers' Bureau

Providing our community partners with speakers on women's health issues for large or small audiences.

**Women's Health:
Knowledge Is Power!**

~
Contact
Esther A. McDowell
626-569-3823 or
emcdowell@ph.lacounty.gov

February ~ American Heart Month

A Good Heart Goes a Long Way Living with a Congenital Heart Defect

The ductus arteriosus (DA) is the temporary blood vessel that allows blood to bypass a baby's lungs before it is born. This allows blood to be shifted away from the lungs into the aorta during fetal growth since the baby does not breathe on its own until after it is born.

When the newborn's lungs take over at birth, the body stops making the chemicals that keep the DA open, causing it to close.

Patent ductus arteriosus (PDA) is a congenital heart defect in which a child's DA fails to close after birth. If the DA remains open, too much blood may go into the baby's lungs a condition that could lead to heart failure.

The incidence of PDA has increased quite dramatically in the last couple of decades due to the improved survival of premature infants.

However, a ductus that does not close is quite rare in full-term babies.

As is the story of Molly McLellan, a survivor of PDA.

Usually the DA is substantially closed within 12-24 hours after birth and is completely sealed after three weeks, so baby Molly was sent home after delivery.

It was not until after one year, when Molly was diagnosed with the chickenpox, that physicians noticed something was wrong with her heart. The

chickenpox caused Molly's heart to flutter and work overtime.

Physicians performed an

Chickenpox caused baby Molly's heart to flutter and work overtime.

angiogram in an attempt to establish why Molly's body was reacting to chickenpox in an unusual way but it took another few months for physicians to diagnose Molly with PDA.

Fortunately, PDA is reversible if discovered early. Nowadays, PDA can be treated non-surgically. However, at that time, though open heart surgery was not necessary, an operation to close the valve was essential towards ensuring Molly's heart functioned normally.

Molly had just started walking before the operation but afterwards had a splint on her ankle with an IV due to an elevated temperature and she wasn't supposed to walk. Doctors informed Molly's parents that because Molly had a congenital heart defect, she should not overwork her body and that she may not be able to do things other children her age could.

Luckily, neither little Molly nor her parents agreed. Her mom and dad could see that the inactivity wasn't good for her spirit so they would hold her hand and let her walk with the splint on. Her dad remembers that once she

Inactivity wasn't good for her spirit.

could move about, her breathing was deeper, fluid didn't build up in her lungs, and he knew she was happier walking beside him than being carried.

When her temperature returned to normal and the splint came off, Molly was enrolled in dance class, which became one of her greatest passions. She started dancing at 2 years of age and did not stop until she was pregnant 26 years later.

Growing up with a congenital heart defect did not mean to Molly and her parents that her life would be less, it meant that it would be more. And that it was absolutely necessary to give her body good nutrition and build strength. Molly continued to be active. Not only did she dance, she played soccer, did gymnastics, and was active in school activities like student government. She also loved eating fruits and her grandmother was responsible for teaching her to love her veggies.

Molly and her mom became involved with the "Zipper Club" – a group of moms who had children with congenital heart defects.

"We went on beach trips, Chuckee Cheese, that sort of thing," she recalls. "Mostly you are hanging out with kids that have big scars like



Grownup Molly and her baby Sarah

you and have had similar problems and you don't feel as self conscious. Many of the kids I met had problems that were so much worse than mine and they were younger. I got to be a friend to them - an older kid who was interested in them and liked them. A lot of it was for the moms too because they saw older kids who had survived major surgeries and were now healthy so it gave them hope."

Hearing their stories, she became inspired with a passion to help other heart disease survivors and their families. Approximately 1 in every 100 children – about

Congenital heart disease affects approximately 1 in every 100 children.

32,000 a year - are born with congenital heart defects.

In early 2006, Molly began volunteering with the American Heart Association. She was active in their Go Red Campaign and by December 2006, was offered a position working with families of survivors of congenital heart disease.

Her inspiration comes not only from her personal experience, but from knowing that there are many other people who live with severe congenital heart disease and she can help.



February is American Heart Month

American Heart Association ~ A Year of Prevention, Intervention and Action ~

The OWH asked Claudia Keller, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Division of the American Heart Association, (AHA) a community partner, about women and heart disease and the importance of their Go Red for Women movement.

"The Heart Association's key message is "prevention, intervention, and action," Ms. Keller states, elaborating that "There are three main problems with heart disease:

- (1) It is the number one killer of women in the United States;
- (2) More women than men die from heart disease;
- (3) Most women do not know this."

While many women recognize that they are at risk for breast cancer, for example, nearly half of all women still don't know that they have a higher risk for heart disease.

In fact, heart disease kills more people each year than all cancers combined - nearly half a million women each year.

That means that approximately once every minute a mother, daughter, sister, or friend is taken away by heart disease.

Yet, especially among women of color, awareness still desperately lags behind the reality and immediacy of the threat.

A woman dies from heart disease every minute.

Prevention

To raise awareness about heart disease and empower women to reduce their risk, the American Heart Association (AHA) spreads the message "Love Your Heart" in their Go Red for Women campaign. Go Red for Women celebrates the energy, passion and power women have to work together to wipe out heart disease and stroke.

In support of this message, on Friday, February 1st, thousands of women all across the nation wore red to celebrate National Wear Red Day. "From women at all stages of life to women in all walks of life, the message is clear: Working together, we can reduce our risk of cardiovascular disease," comments Executive Director Keller.

National Wear Red Day is among the many activities planned to kick off a year of raising awareness about heart health.

AHA in Los Angeles began

Know your family history as well as your cholesterol and other critical numbers.

the celebration on January 30th by joining Councilmember Wendy Greuel to light LA City Hall red for the first time ever, then on the 31st by lighting

windows in the shape of hearts in 11 downtown Los Angeles buildings, visible from freeways. "The hearts

are to remind us that we have control over our heart health," says Ms. Keller, "and that our arteries do not have to be as congested as L.A. freeways."

Intervention

There are many other activities planned for the Go Red Campaign throughout the year including health screenings.

In May, AHA will hold their annual Go Red for Women Luncheon, raising awareness and challenging women to take charge of their health.

Throughout the year, companies can request speakers to discuss the importance of heart health screenings. The AHA can also arrange for screenings if requested.

Claudia Keller stresses that "Women need to know their critical numbers such as cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels.

However, in addition to knowing your critical numbers, it is also important to know your family history and make sure you get the recommended amount of physical activity."



Claudia Keller
AHA Executive Director

Action

This year is a year of celebration and action. In addition to the Go Red Campaign, the AHA strongly supports the *Heart for Women Act*.

This legislation would help to ensure that heart disease and stroke are more widely recognized and more effectively treated in women.

Call to Action

AHA is issuing a Call to Action, encouraging women to join the movement and become part of the solution: go online at www.goredforwomen.org, take the heart checkup and know your numbers.

With the Go Red for Women Campaign and the Heart for Women Act currently in Congress, 2008 will surely be a year of prevention, intervention and action!

Love Your Heart



www.goredforwomen.org

~ **OWH Staff** ~

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Upcoming Conferences

**Ending Violence Against Women:
Making It Happen in LA**
Wednesday, March 12, 2008
7:30am—4:30pm
The California Endowment

Presented by Project Five-O L.A. in collaboration with 20 public and private entities including the OWH, this all day summit will reference the 2006 United Nations Secretary General's *In-depth study of all forms of violence against women*.

The summit will offer interactive discussions and the development of recommendations to bring about effective interventions in LA County for the systemic, policy and human rights abuse issues that contribute to this violence.

Recommendations will be presented to a Listening Panel including L.A. District Attorney Steve Cooley and Mary Wiberg, CA State Commission on the Status of Women.

Project Five-O L.A. is a project of American Association of University Women, Business and Professional Women, Soroptimist International and Zonta International.

For more information and registration form visit: EndViolenceAgainstWomen.org or contact Ginny Hatfield—818-970-4577

Fee: \$50—Walk-ins accepted

Women in Pain: Gender Matters
Friday, May 30, 2008
City of Hope Medical Center

For Grace, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring the ethical and equal treatment of all women in pain, is presenting the first annual *Women in Pain: Gender Matters* conference.

To mark the day, legislators including California State Senator Sheila Kuehl, L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and L.A. City Councilmember Wendy Greuel will officially proclaim May 30, 2008 as "Women In Pain Awareness Day."

The conference is co-sponsored by City of Hope and the Southern California Cancer Pain Initiative.

The focus will be on the disparities in treatment and research toward women in pain, traditional and alternative therapies for pain control, legal and regulatory issues in chronic pain management, and the role of the interdisciplinary team in cancer and pain.

Featured will be a dramatization of the typical doctor-patient relationship and demonstrations of various creative arts therapies.

For more information, please visit www.forgrace.org or call (818) 760-7635.

To register, please visit the Southern California Cancer Pain Initiative web site at <http://sccpi.coh.org/WIP/WIP8.htm>.

UCLA Cancer Prevention & Control Symposium
Making Health Choices Easier Choices:
Lessons from Tobacco Control
Thursday, May 15, 2008
8:00am—4:30pm
The California Endowment

Free symposium for community organizations, researchers, service providers, students, and community members.

- Join in a dialogue about tobacco control successes and challenges and how they inform prevention of cancer and other chronic diseases.
- Culturally competent methods, intervention approaches, research, and evaluation.
- Network with community organizations, health agencies & researchers from the UCLA Division of Cancer Prevention and Control Research.

*For more information:
Irene: 310-206-2165 or hipena@ucla.edu*

Revlon Run/Walk for Women
Saturday, May 10, 2008
LA Memorial Coliseum

The OWH captains the LA County Departments of Public Health and Health Services team.

We welcome your support in this extraordinary event to raise funds for women's cancer research, counseling and outreach programs.

Visit the website to join the team or support the cause:

revlonrunwalkforwomen.com
Team #338