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HIV Testing Program Serves Community

Tuesday, October 5, 2010 - The HIV Testing Program, part of the Community Clinic's programs, provides an essential service to Laguna Beach.

According to Testing Program Director Kim de St. Paer, Laguna Beach is tied with Dade County, Florida, for having the largest population of HIV positive cases in the country.

"Our caseload reflects a mixed population—straight and gay, men and women, all races, and ranging in age from 15-60," according to de St. Paer, who began her service as a Clinic volunteer and has been with the Clinic since 1986.

"One third of new cases are women, and estimates predict infected women will grow to fifty percent of new cases nation wide by 2015," she continued.

"The majority of men and women are infected through heterosexual sex," she added, "and there has been a significant increase in infected senior citizens." For these reasons de St. Paer recommends all who are sexually active be tested.

These gloomy statistics are not the whole picture, however. "Because of early testing and new medications, life expectancy is about the same as for the non-infected. That is why our Testing Program is so important. Early treatment is effective."

"We have tests that give results in 20 minutes now," she said. During the waiting time, de Paer counsels him or her. Also, improved medicines can effectively treat a person infected by rape or needle puncture. This medicine is expensive but when administered within 72 hours of exposure, it is 99 per cent effective," she added.

The word from de St. Paer is "Test and treat, but most of all realize anyone can be a carrier. Do not take chances but also, do not fear a test. Fear an untreated infection."

De St. Paer can be reached at 949-494-0761, Ext. 145, and all HIV tests are administered anonymously. The Laguna Beach Community Clinic is located at 362 Third Street, Laguna Beach. The Clinic is dedicated to providing the highest level of medical care regardless of a client's ability to pay. The Clinic offers free testing for anyone on both World Aids Day and during the yearly Women's Health Day.

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