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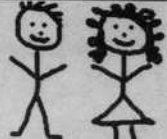
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HIV results must be revealed

■ The Oregon Health Division now requires care providers to submit the names of people who test positive for HIV

By Leon Tovey
Oregon Daily Emerald

As of Oct. 1, health care providers — including the University Health Center — are required to report to the Oregon Health Division the identities of all people who test positive for HIV, the virus that can cause AIDS.

The Oregon Department of Human Services' HIV Program has instituted a new system for reporting, and health care providers will now have to turn over the names of patients who test positive for HIV. After completing a patient's case report, DHS will create an identification code unique to each patient and erase the name from HIV Program records. Under no circumstances, according to DHS, will a person's name be held for more than 90 days.

The policy, which was instituted by DHS after four years of debate, has raised privacy concerns. Some health care providers and citizens' rights groups argue that certain people at risk for the virus will refuse to be tested for fear that their identities will be leaked or reported to other government agencies.

"HIV and AIDS are different; there's still a stigma attached

that can lead to problems for people," said Jann Carson, associate director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon. "DHS needs to be sensitive to that."

Oregon has required that the identities of people with AIDS be reported since 1984, but health care providers were only required to identify those with HIV in certain situations — such as when a unit of donated blood tested positive. However, new treatments have significantly reduced the number of deaths from AIDS and incidents of new AIDS cases since 1995, causing DHS to change the policy.

HIV, the virus that can lead to AIDS, differs from other diseases on OHD's reportable disease list in that it must be reported directly to OHD. Other diseases, such as measles, hepatitis and rubella, must be reported to local county health departments.

Veda Latin, the manager of the HIV, STD and TB program for DHS, said the goal in changing the policy is improve the state's ability to track the spread of HIV and target high-risk populations with new treatments and prevention methods. DHS currently estimates that between 3,800 and 8,600 Oregonians are HIV positive. The hope is that the new policy will give state health officials more accurate numbers, Latin said.

However, there is fear among

those working directly with high-risk populations that many people at risk for infection will not distinguish between having their name or their identification code on file.

"People who are out on the street and at high risk don't understand the subtleties," said Leslie Habetler, advocacy director for the HIV Alliance, a not-for-profit Eugene organization that offers free HIV prevention and counseling services. "These people are very hard to reach and really don't like to deal with the government."

Oregon is the 48th state to institute an HIV reporting system, and Latin said that while there is a possibility that the number of people going for testing might drop, judging from the experiences of other states, those numbers should return to normal after about six months. She also stressed the fact that the new policy would not apply to those who wish to be tested anonymously.

The University Health Center administers approximately 700 HIV tests each year, but Dr. Gerald Fleischli, director of the center, said he is not worried that the change in policy will scare people away.

"If people test positive, there are treatments," he said. "Most people want to get those treatments."

Leon Tovey is a higher education reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at leontovey@dailymerald.com.

Student health educators reach out

■ The health education class allows volunteers to learn while teaching their peers about a variety of health topics

By Diane Huber
Oregon Daily Emerald

Before sophomore Ashley Bunnard signed up for the University's Peer Health Education program, she had thought she wanted to major in political science. But after spending time learning about nutrition, HIV, stress management, alcohol, eating disorders and many other health-related topics, she realized she wanted to pursue a health career, she said.

"There are a lot of programs students don't know about (on campus), and we push the resources that are available," she said.

Bunnard is one of 14 students enrolled in the 3-credit peer health program this term. Students learn by teaching their peers about health-related topics in creative ways, program coordinator Ramah Leith said.

The class extends beyond the classroom; the peers volunteer their time by presenting health topics to groups on campus such

as fraternities, sororities and residence halls, manning informational booths in the Student Recreation Center, and working in the peer health education office on the first floor of the Student Health Center, Leith said.

Peers also publish a newsletter each term and help organize workshops that teach students how to whip up a great vegetarian meal, quit smoking or reduce stress.

Health Educator and former Program Coordinator Annie Dochnahl said the class was organized more than 10 years ago by a group of graduate students. The students based the program on a "peer health model," which was designed to motivate students to teach their peers about health topics.

Since then, the program's focus has been constantly evolving, she said. The peers commit two terms to the program, and the focus of a particular term reflects the interests and passions of the students involved, she said.

Leith encourages students to come to the peer health office in the health center for free cholesterol screenings from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Tuesdays. The office is also open daily from 8

a.m. to 5 p.m. for students interested in consulting the peers about nutrition analysis and any health concerns. Students generally relate to other students and are more likely to talk about their concerns with peers, she said.

Peers also set up a booth every other Wednesday in the lobby of the Student Recreation Center to inform students about topics such as safety, sexual practices and nutrition, Dochnahl said. For the booth on Oct. 31, the peers will collaborate with Project SafeRide to teach students about alcohol and safety, she said.

Bunnard joined the program because she thought her public speaking skills were dwindling and the public speaking aspect attracted her attention, she said.

Dochnahl said the program provides an opportunity for students to learn skills to benefit them in the future.

"(The student educators) take what they learn in the classroom and convert it to something useful for their classmates," she said. "They can see the merit of 'give as you learn.' It's not just them as a sponge."

Diane Huber is a student activities reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. She can be reached at dianehuber@dailymerald.com.

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