

# HEALTH

## Aids: The Second Decade A Focus On African Americans

BY M. KEITH RAWLINGS, M.D.

It is well documented that AIDS is sweeping through our community. The discouraging statistics demonstrate the awful impact that this disease has had:

Since 1990, AIDS has been the leading cause of death for Black men between 25 and 44 years of age in the United States

Blacks account for over 50% of AIDS cases among women and children

Although Blacks represent only 12% of the United States' population, we account for approximately 32% of the reported Aids Cases

Clearly, the impact of AIDS in our community is a problem that must be addressed.

There are a variety of reasons that AIDS has spread in the Black community: lack of community awareness; unequal access to AIDS education and medical services; drug use and sex within the drug culture; our limited acknowledgment of bi-



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sexual and homosexual behavior; and the high numbers of our men in prison. However, as a doctor, one of the most frustrating aspects of the AIDS epidemic in our community is the belief that nothing can be done about HIV infection, that it is untreatable. Some even believe the myth that AIDS is not caused by HIV. For many Blacks, these beliefs lead to not being tested for HIV, causing

them to delay seeking medical care. The result is that HIV-related conditions are often not treated until late in the course of the disease, shortening and reducing the quality of the lives of those who are infected, as we saw recently with rapper Eric Wright, better known as "Eazy-E."

Despite the belief of many in our community, there are treatments that doctors can prescribe and actions that people with HIV can take to live longer and healthier lives. Drugs are available that can treat both HIV infection and many of the conditions that are associated with the disease. Although all drugs have side effects, in most patients the benefits outweigh the risks. While we have not yet found a cure, health care professionals are better able to control the virus, helping our patients live longer and more fulfilling lives.

In addition to medical treatments, there are several things that people with HIV can do to maintain their health.

## Program Initiated To Attract Minority Businesses

Massachusetts' Executive Office of Health and Human Services announces an initiative to solicit minority businesses for participation in its Division of Medical Assistance contracts. DMA administers the state's Medicaid program.

The program will be facilitated by Rickman and Byrne, a minority marketing and outreach firm. The goal of the initiative will be to attract minority businesses currently certified with the State Office of Minority and Women Business Assistance (SOMWBA), as well as entities that may qualify for certification. DMA's Offices of Contract Management and Affirmative Action will oversee the program which will work to increase

qualified minority contractor and subcontractor participation in the following areas:

- Medical Utilization Review
- Systems Analysis, Design and Operation
- Managed Care Program Development
- Health Care Management Consulting
- Health Care Data Analysis
- Accounting (with health care specialty)
- Minor Construction

The outreach initiative will begin by creating a database list of minority businesses that specialize in these areas. The database will include a notification system that will

keep targeted minority businesses informed of DMA Request for Proposals (RFP's) and other contract solicitations. The system will also alert smaller businesses that may be able to contract with prime vendors as subcontractors. This summer DMA will sponsor a series of workshops for minority businesses that are interested in being notified of DMA contracts and the MBE certification process in Massachusetts.

To have your company placed on the DMA list, contact:

Rickman & Byrne; Executive Consultant; 305 South Main Street; Providence, RI. 02903. Or call 401-454-1490.

## Escherichia Coli Cases Decline

The number of E. Coli infections reported in Oregon has declined sharply since 1993, state health officials announced. One hundred seven cases were reported in 1994, which is fewer than half of the 254 cases reported in 1993. According to Dr. Katrina Hedberg, deputy state epidemiologist, the downward trend is continuing. Only 25 cases of E. Coli infections were reported in Oregon during the first half of 1995, compared to 48 cases reported in the first half of 1994.

E. Coli O157:H7 is a bacterium commonly found in cattle. It is usually transmitted to humans from undercooked beef, particularly hamburger. "Food items that come in contact with meat-contaminated sur-

faces also pose a risk," Hedberg said. "For example, salad can be contaminated if prepared on an unwashed cutting board that has just been used to make a hamburger patty." She stressed that utensils and surfaces that have touched raw meat should be washed thoroughly before being used to prepare other foods, and hands should always be washed immediately after handling meat. E. Coli O157:H7 may also be passed from one person to another, usually in the household or day care setting, and transmission can be prevented by washing hands after using the toilet or diapering.

E. Coli O157:H7 infections are marked by diarrhea (often bloody), abdominal cramps and other symp-

ptoms. Severe cases, particularly in children, may progress to kidney failure and other serious complications. Persons who develop bloody diarrhea should see a doctor. Physicians who examine persons with bloody diarrhea should submit stool specimens for culture.

Hedberg said the decline in cases may indicate that consumers are heeding the message that hamburger may contain E. Coli O157:H7 and must be completely cooked (no pink in the center) before eating. The summer cookout season has arrived so Hedberg cautions consumers, "Remember to thoroughly cook hamburger, and do not allow prepared foods to come into contact with juices from raw meats."

## Hearings To Address Medicaid Changes

Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee held two hearings last week examining the Medicaid program.

Medicaid is the health insurance program for low-income individuals which is funded jointly by the federal government and the states.

It is the third largest social spending program in the federal budget. Only Social Security and Medicaid are bigger.

Packwood said Medicaid spending has exploded over the last 20 years and will continue to skyrocket.

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The Congressional Budget Office estimates that federal Medicaid spending will double again in the next seven years.

"Medicaid is also a budget monster for states," Packwood said.

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the states. These mandates have caused states to lose control of their Medicaid spending.

"We need to take a step back and look for ways to control the cost of this program and give states the ability to decide how best to meet the particular health care needs of their low-income residents," Packwood said.

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## Phil Reynolds Scholarship Awards

Continued from Metro

schedule she was active in the Key Club. She currently teaches Black History to six and seventh graders at the Oregon Episcopal School. Miss Jackson will enter Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island in the fall to explore her interests and discover her future career.

Mr. Robert Jamison is a recent graduate of Franklin High School. He was actively involved in sports and successfully holds a job in the work place. Robert will attend West Valley College at Saratoga, California this fall in the Health Profession field, because of the challenge that it offers and the positive contribution he wishes to make to society.

We are confident that these recipients will achieve success in their chosen field of endeavor. Our best wishes.

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