

HIV strikes more than immune system

By JILL REED
Science writer

Texas A&M University researchers are searching for a cure for HIV, but in the meantime, awareness programs educate students about the physical and psychological aspects of the disease.

Virologists study vaccine development, and social psychologists study HIV-related illnesses and public access to healthcare.

The health education program at A.P. Beutel Health Center offers counseling services to students affected by HIV and other sexual health issues.

The exact number of cases in the Brazos County area is unknown, and it is difficult to estimate.

Between 1994 and 1997, the Texas Department of Health reported 28 new cases of HIV infection in Brazos County, but the number is an estimate because a case is recorded where it is diagnosed not where the individual lives.

Margaret Griffith, a coordinator for the health education program, said that for every known HIV-infection in Brazos County, another 10 undiagnosed cases exist.

Campus surveys show that students believe they are not at risk, but A&M has a higher rate of chlamydia

and gonorrhea infections than the state average, and these diseases are spread the same way as HIV, Griffith said.

Daniel Fowler, a coordinator for the Health Services of the Brazos Valley, said health services only interacts with those who have no health insurance, whereas most college students use private health care in their hometown.

In the last year and a half, 95 percent of newly diagnosed cases were women between the ages of 14 and 24.

New laws that require HIV-antibody tests for all pregnant women receiving prenatal care might explain the high diagnosis rates in this age group.

Griffith said no one is exempt from being infected, and anyone can be at risk if they have had unprotected sex of any kind.

Pam Morales, an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, works with both physical and psychological aspects of the virus in the counseling psychology program.

Smoking, bad eating habits, stress and no exercise will lower immune system efficiency, which can allow HIV to have a greater effect on the body, she said.

Ellen Collisson, a professor in virology and a veterinary pathobiologist, studies Feline Immunodeficiency Virus as a model for HIV.

There are generally three stages of immunodeficiency viral infection, Collisson said.

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Pam Morales
assistant professor, Department of Educational Psychology

There is an acute stage — a mild, flu-like infection, an asymptomatic stage — no signs of illness and an suppressed immunity stage — recurring illnesses and infections that would otherwise not harm the body.

Morales said that HIV progression is different in women than in men.

Both genders suffer flu-like symptoms such as night sweats and high

fevers, but each gender is susceptible to separate diseases once the virus suppresses the immune system.

Illnesses such as pre-cancerous pap smears, cervical cancer, uterine cancer and heavy menses are common for women with immune suppression, while men become sensitive to Kaposi's sarcoma.

The psychological effects are as different for men and women as the symptomatic diseases.

Although men are more likely to worry about finances, women usually focus on their children or mourn because they cannot have children.

Many women do not know about programs that are available for their families, such as housing programs, social security, health insurance, food banks, food stamps and Medicaid for doctors and prescriptions.

"In the medical community, we need better support systems for women," Morales said.

The public is not concerned with U.S. government funding cuts for HIV-research programs because new drugs can halt progression of the disease, Morales said.

However, these drugs cannot help everyone, and the drugs are so expensive that the poorer communities are dying because they cannot afford treatment.

HDTV to leave many with blank screens

ATLANTA (AP) — When television broadcasters begin dressing up their programming in the new high-definition format, perhaps as early as this fall, cable systems will have to cooperate or it is going to be "can't see TV."

Cable TV executives say local cable systems will be ready to pipe the sharper pictures and CD-like sound into viewers' homes.

Still, just how to handle the next generation of television is much on the minds of cable executives gathering Sunday in Atlanta for their annual convention. The dilemma is twofold:

Whether broadcasters will have guarantees that cable will carry their signals; and how the signal will be delivered into customers' digital TV sets.

TCI, Time Warner, Cox, Comcast and other cable companies, who own the local systems, say they will use set-top boxes that broadcasters are pushing to give cable customers with digital sets access to broadcasters' high-definition and other digital channels.

A greater problem, however, is the carriage guarantee.

Broadcasters are agitating for the government to force local cable systems to carry the advanced digital channels as they now carry the analog ones. The Federal Communications Commission is expected to take up the matter in June.

The cable industry opposes government requirements, preferring voluntary carriage agreements.

During the transition to digital, local TV stations will be allowed to have two channels, one for digital, the other for the current analog TV system.

Most cable systems lack the channel space to carry both digital and analog signals, but upgrades already

are under way to provide system space to carry both.

If the FCC ordered a blanket commitment for cable to carry broadcast signals, cable systems without open channels on their systems would have to drop cable networks to make room, cable executives say.

That, said Decker Anström, national Cable Television Association president, is unacceptable. "As a matter of policy," he said, "we will never accept that every broadcast signal takes priority over a cable network."

"A time will come when the whole discussion is purely academic because

technology and shell space capabilities will be roughing same in my opinion, as the definition of vision begins to

throughout our society," said Hindery, president of cable Tele-Communications Inc.

But were the government to require mandatory carriage of new signals before that happens, Hindery said, that "would be of the greatest displacement high-quality (cable) program — one of the rudest things ever, ever imagine for consumers in this country."

"We've got to reach our customer one way or the other. We're concerned there will be a roadblock in reaching viewers," said Pauer, vice president of Fox Television Inc.

While cable and broadcast duke it out over mandating carriage of digital channels, companies are working to get set-top boxes for customers buy digital sets.



Shuttle returns, neuroscience research continues

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Space shuttle Columbia and its crew returned to Earth on Sunday, ending two weeks of lab work that advanced brain research despite unexpected animal casualties. And the experiments were far from over.

Within an hour, the crew was hustled off to medical tests that were expected to go on for days. Six of the seven astronauts left on stretchers; doctors wanted them reclining to preserve their weightless state.

At the same time, NASA rushed to unload the animals so scientists could begin dissecting the few dozen surviving baby rats, as well as the nearly 2,000 fish, snails, crickets and older rodents that flew. Most of the young rats died in orbit, victims of maternal neglect.

It was a race against gravity: the sooner the astronauts and animals could be examined, the greater the likelihood of observing space-in-

duced changes in the nervous system.

"I'm sitting here like a little kid with ants in my pants," said Gay Holstein, a Mount Sinai School of Medicine researcher whose rats flew on Columbia. "I can't wait to get going on my experiment."

To everyone's relief, Columbia landed right on time at the Kennedy Space Center, where about 200 researchers waited with scalpels.

Commander Richard Searfoss had only two functioning hydraulic power units for most of the hourlong descent. The cooling system for the third unit failed to work Saturday; Searfoss turned that unit on just minutes before touchdown so it would not overheat.

As soon as Columbia rolled to a safe stop, Mission Control congratulated the astronauts for "a historic mission that elevated neuroscience research to record heights."

Among the space firsts achieved during the

16-day Neurolab flight: first direct nerve recordings, first joint recording of sleep and breathing, first embalming of animals and first surgery on animals meant to survive.

"The data obtained are really a precious resource that will help us to unlock some of the mysteries of the brain," said NASA program scientist Mary Anne Frey. "I wish I could tell you the results right now ... but much remains to be done."

Only the rodent researchers knew for sure what they were getting back.

The astronauts kept close watch on the 170 rodents that rocketed into orbit with them on April 17, especially when the baby rats started dying. The surrogate mother rats could not or would not nurse the young animals in space. Although 55 of the 96 baby rats died prematurely, researchers hoped they still could achieve their primary objectives.

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