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Thursday, November 30, 2000

**Aiding the HIV-positive
A&M groups to reach out during World AIDS Day 2000**

By NONI SRIDHARA
The Battalion

As finals approach, many students find themselves studying all night to make that last-minute A. For the past year, a senior biomedical science major who wishes to remain anonymous has been pulling "all-nighters" every night fighting a greater battle taking care of his family. The student is one of thousands of young Americans who have fallen victim to AIDS. The student did not find out he was HIV-positive until he and his wife had a daughter last year.

He said he was shocked when he discovered that he had passed the virus to his wife, who in turn passed it on to their baby girl.

"At (24), you think you're invincible and do not need to be responsible," he said.

"That's what hurts me the most is that my actions have hurt so many loved ones unnecessarily, and a helpless little child. Hopefully for her it will never become full-blown. There are many new medications coming out, but she'll still never know what it's like to live a normal life."

The student, previously an engineering major, said he switched majors so he could go to medical school and devote himself to finding a cure for the sake of his daughter.

To support others like the student and to educate the public, World AIDS Day 2000 kicks off Friday. Student Health Services, Aggie Reach and AIDS Services of the Brazos Valley will distribute information about HIV

and AIDS at Rudder Fountain from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This year's theme, "Men Make a Difference," is part of a two-year campaign focusing on the role of men in the AIDS epidemic.

"The campaign hopes to raise awareness of the relationship between men's behavior and HIV, encourage men and adolescent boys to make a strong commitment to preventing the spread of HIV and caring for those in-

The illness often are caused by common bacteria, yeast and viruses that ordinarily do not cause disease in healthy individuals.

According to World Health Organization reports, at the end of 1999 more than 315,000 people in the United States have been diagnosed with AIDS. More than half of the people have died. Most die within four years of showing symptoms of the disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that 2.2 million Americans now carry the HIV virus, but not all of the cases show symptoms.

Jenna Easton, a spokeswoman with the CDC, said the number is probably significantly higher, but there are many unreported and many people have HIV but do not get tested.

"There still remains a highly negative stigma around patients with HIV or AIDS," Easton said. "Some people think if they are in the same room with a person with AIDS, they will contract it, but this is not the case."

She said there are effective means of preventing complications, but for people who could have been exposed to the virus, delaying tests could speed up the progression to full-blown AIDS.

Easton said while there is no cure for AIDS, one treatment is the drug Retrovir, which is an anti-viral agent.

"People with HIV infection need to receive education about the disease and treatment," she said. "Safe sex may reduce the risk of acquiring the infection. Abstinence is the only sure way to prevent sexual transmission of the virus."

fect, and to promote programs that respond to the needs of both men and women," said Margaret Griffith, health education coordinator at A.P. Beutel Health Center, in a press release.

AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus and is characterized by severe immune system deficiency. The virus attacks the immune system, leaving the body vulnerable to a variety of life-threatening illnesses.

"There still remains a highly negative stigma around patients with HIV or AIDS."

— Jenna Easton
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention spokeswoman

Medicinal costs rise

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly half of Americans suffer from at least one chronic disease, everything from allergies to heart disease — 20 million more than doctors had anticipated this year, researchers say.

And they warn that the fast-growing toll, now at 125 million among a population of 276 million, will reach 157 million by 2020. One-fifth of Americans have two or more chronic illnesses, complicating their care and making it more expensive.

The nation is unprepared to cope with the growing burden of chronic disease, with annual medical bills alone expected to almost double to \$1.07 trillion by 2020, Dr. Gerard Anderson of Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University told a meeting Wednesday of 1,000 chronic disease specialists.

While doctors have made major advances in treating certain chronic illnesses, they cause 70 percent of all U.S. deaths, reports the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which convened the meeting to explore ways to better prevent and fight long-term illness.

It is a difficult subject partly because so many different diseases qualify. Simple allergies may not kill someone, but require a lifetime of medication and doctor visits. Heart disease can require even more complex drug therapy, surgery and testing. At the other extreme is Alzheimer's disease, eventually requiring around-the-clock care.

Preventive care — weight management, disease screening, nutrition, exercise, geriatric assessments for the elderly — can stave off many chronic diseases. But it takes longer than writing a prescription, and few insurers reimburse fully, Anderson said.

He quoted an insurance director who said his patients demand payment for such care as in vitro fertilization, not ways to prevent illnesses they might not get for decades.

Then he cited a rural Maryland physician's lament about his diabetic patient, an overweight farmer whose insurance pays for a 20-minute visit, just enough time to test his blood sugar and adjust medication. The doctor says helping the man lose weight would do more good, but he is not paid to do that.

Already 60 million Americans suffer multiple chronic illnesses, a number expected to reach 81 million by 2020 as the population ages, Anderson reported.

Someone without a chronic illness pays an average of \$182 a year in out-of-pocket health expenses, Anderson said, compared with \$369 in out-of-pocket payments by patients with one chronic illness and \$1,106 for someone battling three or more.

Total annual health costs for someone with one chronic illness are more than five times higher than for a healthy person — \$6,032 vs. \$1,105 — and rise even higher the more disabling the chronic illness is, he reported.

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