



Friday, March 7, 2003

HIV/AIDS topic of next colloquium

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

While most HIV and AIDS prevention awareness campaigns are aimed at drug abusers and the young, Associate Professor of Nursing Frances Jackson would like to add older Americans to the list – a group she says has been seriously overlooked.

"Basically, we've put a young face on HIV/AIDS. But somehow, without even recognizing it, this problem has escalated in the older population," Jackson said. "In my research, I tried to identify issues involving HIV transmission in adults age 50 and over. I wanted to ask if we can attribute this to risky behavior, knowledge or susceptibility."

Jackson's eye-opening presentation, "HIV and the Aging African-American," will be the topic of Oakland University's next President's Colloquium on Tuesday, March 18, in the Oakland Center Gold Rooms. A reception begins at 11:30 a.m., with the presentation following at noon. The event is open to the public, but seating is limited. Call (248) 370-4648 to make reservations.

According to the Center for Disease Control, HIV in older adults, particularly through heterosexual contact, is growing at an alarming rate. Between 1992 and 1995, HIV increased in young adults by 9 percent, while increasing in persons ages 50 and older by almost 22 percent. These statistics prompted Jackson to undertake groundbreaking research in this area as it related to older African-Americans.

"I started gaining interest in this topic in 1999 when I read an article with those statistics," Jackson said. "I didn't find much research in this area, and that's when I realized that no one was looking into it."

"Between 1999 and 2002, the percentage of AIDS patients age 50 and older increased from 10 to 12 percent. It may not sound like much, but clinically speaking, a 2 percent increase means a lot of people. I chose to focus my research on African-Americans because they comprise 30 percent of the HIV population and almost 80 percent of all new cases. Overall, the epidemic of new cases is occurring in African-American and Hispanic communities. To try to prevent this from happening, it's important to start prevention education now."

Ironically, those who are most targeted by prevention and education campaigns practice safer sex than older adults, Jackson said.

"The drug abuse population know they can get this disease and practice safe sex more often because they're aware of this fact," Jackson said. "What I've found is that older adults are very amenable to being educated about HIV, but they tend to pass that knowledge on to their younger relatives. A very important issue is to figure out how to get seniors to see themselves at risk. It's very hard to try to make them understand that HIV and AIDS applies to them, too."

"As a nurse, I feel it's the role of an older person to practice safe sex like younger adults. As a health care provider, I believe we can't assume that a 65-year-old person is not sexually active. We cannot overstate the influence of Viagra. We have to stop making assumptions, start asking questions and perform HIV tests on older people. Otherwise, this problem can go undetected and untreated."

The President's Colloquium Series was established in 1995 to showcase achievements of Oakland University researchers, to promote communication and collaboration among scientists, and to recognize the outstanding work of "Nobel Class" scientists.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, March 7, 2003
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, March 7, 2003
Article Start Date: Tuesday, October 14, 2003

