Contact Information

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center demonstrates its commitment to improving community health through a wide range of programs that provide access to information and services for those in greatest need. For example, The Medical Center provides free or low-cost care for the uninsured and the poor, and in partnership with many community organizations, offers hundreds of health education programs and clinics where screening can lead to early diagnosis and referrals. The community also benefits over the long term from Cedars-Sinai’s investment in educating tomorrow’s healthcare providers and conducting innovative research that accelerates medical progress.

For more information about this newsletter, please contact Cindy Levey, MPH, (323) 866-2997, or cindy.levey@cshs.org.
In the Right Place at the Right Time

PERSON JEWISH GENETIC SCREENING PROGRAM AT CEDARS-SINAI OFFERS POSSIBILITY OF ERADICATING FOUR HEREDITARY DISEASES

BY THE NUMBERS
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In the Right Place at the Right Time

PERSIAN JEWISH GENETIC SCREENING PROGRAM AT CEDARS-SINAI OFFERS POSSIBILITY OF ERADICATING FOUR HEREDITARY DISEASES

BY THE NUMBERS

It came about through the intersection of three powerful forces: political events in Iran, advances in the field of genetic medicine and the vision of a Cedars-Sinai geneticist.

David Rimon, MD, PhD, director of the Medical Genetics Institute at Cedars-Sinai, recognized that he was in the right place at the right time to develop a one-of-a-kind genetic screening program for Persian Jews in the Los Angeles area.

The mass exodus of Jews from Iran during the revolution in the late 1970s brought nearly half the world’s Persian Jewish population to this region. And advances in molecular medicine have allowed scientists to identify markers for the recessive genetic disorders that are common in this group so these conditions can be diagnosed, prevented and treated.

Following the Tay-Sachs Model

Rimon’s screening program focuses on four conditions: an anesthesia sensitivity, a self-losing disorder, a multiple hormone deficiency and an incurable muscle disorder that can be crippling to young adults—but can be prevented through genetic counseling, prenatal screening and, in some cases, in vitro fertilization.

“These are conditions with serious health consequences if left unchecked, but they are easily treated or prevented with screening,” Rimon says. “In time, we can wipe out these disorders in the Persian Jewish population just as Tay-Sachs was virtually eliminated from the Ashkenazi Jewish population through education and screening.”

Rimon recruited Michael Kaback, MD, the creator of the Tay-Sachs program, to join him as a consultant in the Persian Jewish screening program, a joint effort of the Cedars-Sinai Department of Pathology and the Medical Genetics Institute. The program was launched in 2009 through a research project funded in part by the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.

Initially, confidential screenings, which involve a simple saliva test, were offered over a 10-week period at no charge in synagogues and community centers. About 1,500 people were tested, and those who had one of the disorders or were carriers received genetic counseling.

Grateful for Information

One 29-year-old woman who asked to remain anonymous discovered she has the anesthesia disorder. “It’s so important to have this information because now I know the different types of anesthesia I should avoid,” she says.

She also learned she’s a carrier for the muscle disorder, and is grateful to be aware that she should ever want to have children with a man who is also a carrier for this disease, they will need to get counseling to avoid passing it on.

Rimon, the Steven Spielberg Family Chair in Pediatrics at Cedars-Sinai, plans to eventually expand the screening program to reach other large Persian Jewish communities, and to use it as a model for screening other ethnic groups for inherited disorders. To learn more, or arrange for screening, contact Catherine Quindipan at (310) 423-9547.

Teamwork with an Unexpected Twist

TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISE FOR CEDARS-SINAI EMPLOYEES BRIGHTENS THE LIVES OF CHILDREN FROM HOMELESS SHELTER IN CULVER CITY

It all made sense when a boy mounted his new bicycle with a big grin and said, “This is the best day ever.”

Earlier in the day in an auditorium at Cedars-Sinai, a group of about 50 employees had been given an unusual assignment as part of a team-building exercise. They were divided into small groups and asked to assemble 20 brand new bicycles.

Mitch Martens, a senior administrative services associate in the Quality/Performance Improvement and Medical Staff Services department, organized the exercise. He didn’t tell the employees they would soon give the bicycles to children from a homeless shelter. He arranged that surprise by working with Michele Rigby Pauley, director of Cedars-Sinai’s COACH for Kids & Their Families® program. He wanted this exercise to demonstrate to employees who don’t interact with patients that “everything we do at Cedars-Sinai directly or indirectly impacts the patient.”

After the bicycles had been put together and inspected for safety, a bus filled with families from Upward Bound Family Shelter in Culver City arrived at the Medical Center. The children hadn’t been told what was in store either.

An Emotional Boost

“When the employees saw the kids walk into the room wide-eyed and excited, they got it,” Martens said. “Everyone had worked together to make this happen.”

The Upward Bound shelter in Culver City is one of many community sites where the COACH program sends mobile medical units to provide health services and information to those with limited access to healthcare.

BEYOND ‘JUST SAY NO’ continued from page 1

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When Vickburg started visiting schools, teachers and students were wary. He says some teachers had given up on students labeled troublemakers and some students had given up on themselves. But he’s seeing signs of positive change in students and school staff.

For example, when two boys got into a fight at one high school recently, a school security officer intervened and brought the one who’d started it to Vickburg’s classroom instead of the principal’s office. “He still had to deal with consequences, but he also got help,” Vickburg says. “That’s a big step forward.”

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Caring for Our Community

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center demonstrates its commitment to improving community health through a wide range of programs that provide free or low-cost care for uninsured and underinsured people. For more information about this newsletter, please contact Cindy Levey, MPH, (323) 866-2997, or cindy.levey@cshs.org.

Free Flu Shots For Those at Highest Risk

Anyone can get the flu. Not everyone can afford a flu shot. Cedars-Sinai offers free flu shot clinics at nine Los Angeles area locations for seniors and other high-risk individuals in underserved communities.

Overall, the message from panelists at the annual Breast Cancer Educational Forum was upbeat. Panelists included Farin Amersi, MD, breast reconstructive surgeon; Barbara Cowen, a licensed clinical social worker; and Dorothy Park, MD, medical oncologist.

The panel addressed concerns regarding the road to recovery.

"You are not alone," Park stressed. "We develop personalized treatment for patients and mobilize a team encompassing medical and psychological care, together with nutritionists, survivors and volunteers." Cowen observed: "Feelings of 'Why me?' come up. But breast cancer does not have to define you."

Selvin, a 13-year breast cancer survivor, said early detection saved her life. "You have to be an advocate for yourself, be proactive, look for resources," she noted. She also pointed out that it's healing to get involved in efforts to increase awareness about prevention of breast cancer, early detection and treatment options. "As survivors, the best thing we can do is educate and help others."

More Women Getting Early Diagnosis

Land added a hopeful note: "The rates of breast cancer deaths have been declining since 1990. More women are getting diagnosed earlier."

There are now approximately 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. "We've reached a 90 percent survival rate of Stage One breast cancer for five years. We have made great strides," Amersi said.

The annual flu clinic is always highly anticipated," said Wanda Boyd, program coordinator for the center. "We appreciate that Cedars-Sinai offers such vital health services to our seniors."

The vaccines provide protection against various strains of influenza and the H1N1 virus. Pneumococcal immunizations are also offered. In 2009, Cedars-Sinai provided more than 5,000 free immunizations to those in need at locations including the Second AME Church, Temple Beth Am and Plummer Park.

Beyond ‘Just Say No’

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM HELPS TEENS UNDERSTAND EMOTIONAL ‘TRIGGERS’ THAT LEAD TO ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

At first, Maria (not her real name) said very little as she sat among a small group of peers assembled at a South Los Angeles high school by counselor Jonathan Vickburg. He asked the students to help him make a list of emotional "triggers" that might cause them to turn to alcohol and drugs for comfort or escape—feelings such as anger, loneliness and sadness.

Maria remained silent during the first few weekly sessions. When she finally spoke up, it was clear she'd been paying close attention. "My problem isn't drugs. It's anger," she said.

When a troubled teen makes a statement like this, it's like striking gold for Vickburg and other counselors in the Substance Abuse Educational Program launched in 2009 by the Psychological Trauma Center, which is based at Cedars-Sinai.

The program sends counselors to middle schools and high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSDJ to help students develop healthy outlets for their emotions.

Feeling Hurt, Scared and Alone

Recognizing feelings that lead to substance abuse and being able to talk about them in a safe environment can be a transforming experience for teens. Maria, who admitted she was smoking marijuana and experimenting with crystal meth and cocaine, told Vickburg that, after spending most of her life in foster homes, she felt no one really cared.

Vickburg gave her a journal and encouraged her to write about her feelings. "So many people in her life had forgotten about her. She was able to see that underneath her anger she felt hurt and scared," he says. "We talked about how to deal with those feelings without drugs. That's where the journal came in. She learned she could change her behavior and stop sabotaging herself."

Maria stopped using drugs and significantly improved her grades, Vickburg says. He’s seen other students do the same. "They let their guard down in the group and, as they support each other, they learn that people really do value them. That helps them begin the process of change."