

Organization opens Mississippi's first LGBT health care center

ARIDGELAND, MISS., Nonprofit organization is moving the needle on expanding access to care for underserved populations with the opening of the state's first health care center for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community.

The Open Arms Health-care Center opened Feb. 7, 2013, under the nonprofit group My Brother's Keeper, Inc. Its work was highlighted in a presentation at APHA's 141st Annual Meeting and Exposition in Boston in November.

My Brother's Keeper Inc. works closely with the LGBT community and sponsors Jackson Black Pride, an annual event held in Jackson, Miss., to bring awareness to the city's LGBT community, said June Gipson, PhD, CEO of My Brother's Keeper Inc.

My Brother's Keeper Inc. collected two years of survey data from the state's LGBT residents about their medical needs. The survey

revealed that people wanted a place where they would feel at ease and that some people held off on medical care because they feared discrimination or lack of privacy, said Shemeka Hamlin-Palmer, PhD, the center's clinical quality assurance manager.

"They wanted to go somewhere where they felt no one would disclose their information," Hamlin-Palmer said at the meeting.

"They wanted more health prevention. They wanted more individualized care than just for the entire LGBT population."

Using the nonprofit organization's existing connections to state health professionals, the center created a network of doctors, nurses

and counselors who volunteer their time to make sure this population received preventive and clinical care services.

The preventive care comes through the center's Becoming a Healthy You program, where patients can come in Monday through Friday for screenings, such as to test their glucose levels and blood pressure or for sexually transmitted infections.

The clinical side takes place Saturdays 8 a.m. to 1

p.m. and is staffed by two infectious disease doctors, a general nurse practitioner, a women's health nurse practitioner, a registered nurse, two phlebotomists and a front desk person who also handles billing, Gipson said.

Gipson said 40 percent of the center's patients have Medicaid or Medicare and many are uninsured.

"The services are on a sliding scale," Gipson told *The Nation's Health*. "You have your lab work. We fundraise to be able to pay for their labs. And we have other organizations to fundraise for us to do lab work."

The center also provides a food and clothing pantry, a referral network and transportation services.

For the transgender community in particular, the center offers mental health counseling and help getting safe hormones.

"We're making sure they have prescriptions that meet their needs and lab work to check their hormone levels to make sure they're on pace with their health," Gipson said.

Since opening, the center has helped 215 patients. The clinic averages 15 to 20 patients every Saturday. Between 30 and 40 people attend the weekly Becoming a Healthy You program.

For more information, visit <http://oahcc.org>. ■

— Natalie McGill

Watch a video interview about the Open Arms Health-care Center online at www.thenationshealth.org.



Photo by Natalie McGill

Shemeka Hamlin-Palmer discusses the Open Arms Health-care Center, Mississippi's first LGBT health center, at APHA's Annual Meeting in Boston.

Barbershop-based program educates young black men about safe sex, STIs

WITH men accounting for two-thirds of new HIV infections among blacks in the U.S., and high rates in Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania researchers looked for the best way to reach the population about safe sex. They found it in the barber's chair.

The Shape Up! Barbers Building Better Brothers program launched in 2009 as a one-on-one intervention with Philadelphia-area barbers and young black men, said Loretta Jemmott, PhD, FAAN, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Health Equity Research and a van Ameringen professor in psychiatric mental health nursing at the university's School of Nursing. The research, presented at a session at APHA's 141st Annual Meeting and Exposition in Boston in November, is funded by the National Institute for Child and Human Development.

Researchers reached out to barbershops located in sections of Philadelphia that have the highest incidence of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and violence. Jemmott formed a community advisory board of barbers and barbershop owners who provided their input on how the information should be presented to their customers.

Public health workers around the nation have been using barbershops and beauty salons as sites for public health interventions in recent decades because of their ties to the community.

"They care about their brothers in the community," Jemmott told *The Nation's Health*. "They think they are the vehicle that could promote the health of young men. They're community guys who want to stand up and do something different."

The program is a two-day, two-part intervention, Jemmott said. Barbers recruit regular customers ages 18 to 24 as participants. On the first day,

they fill out a questionnaire and provide a urine sample to researchers to test later for gonorrhea and chlamydia before watching a video on an iPad in the waiting room. The participants also use an app to answer questions, such as if they have ever had unprotected sex.

In one of the videos played during the Annual Meeting session, an older black man stares directly at the camera and says that it does not matter who someone is, but what they do that puts them at risk for HIV.

"Don't share needles or worse," he says. "Limit your partners. If you do have sex, use a condom every time. Be a man. Protect yourself. Protect your woman. Protect your community," he says.

The participants then have a discussion guided by questions on the iPad with their barber while sitting in the customer chair. On the second day, the participants watch another video and have another conversation with the barber using the iPad. They also find out if they tested positive for either chlamydia or gonorrhea, Jemmott said. Customers who test

positive are treated free of charge, and are instructed to let their partners know about their status, Jemmott said.

As of November there were 48 barbers and 556 young men participating. A total of 72 tested positive for either chlamydia or gonorrhea but had not exhibited any STI symptoms prior to that. The men also come back for three-, six- and 12-month follow-ups, Jemmott said.

The program is intended to get young black men educated about their risk for sexually transmitted infections, and to communicate with their partners about negotiating condom use.

Jemmott said she hopes the program can get close to 700 participating young black men. ■

— Natalie McGill

"They think that they are the vehicle that could promote the health of young men."

— Loretta Jemmott

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