



# Hepatitis Update

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## Hepatitis Awareness Day at the Capitol

By April Crowley

This annual event is always a great opportunity to have viral hepatitis educational materials available and answer questions about hepatitis A, B and C. Our display provided statistics and information to hundreds of people who wandered the third floor rotunda on February 3, 2016.

We distributed viral hepatitis educational materials, including palm cards, brochures and fact sheets to the public. We answered numerous questions about prevention, vaccines, risk factors, treatment, transmission and community resources.

P.C. Wu, PhD, a retired professor, came by our display and was very eager to talk about viral hepatitis. Dr. Wu, a current member of the Pensacola City Council, concurs wholeheartedly with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation that all baby boomers (people born from 1945-1965) need to be tested for hepatitis C. More than 75 percent of adults infected are baby boomers, and most are unaware of their infection. The longer people live with hepatitis C, the more likely they are to develop serious, life-threatening liver disease.

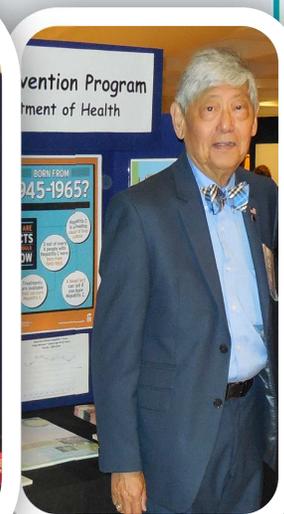
*Hepatitis Update* is brought to you by the Division of Disease Control and Health Protection, Bureau of Communicable Diseases, STD and Viral Hepatitis Section.

If you have a news item or photo you would like to submit, email the editor at:

April.Crowley@flhealth.gov



Above: Phil Reichert and April Crowley with the Hepatitis Prevention Program Display



Above: Dr. Wu

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## Welcome Aboard Craig Wilson

By Patricia L. Ryder, MD, MPH  
Chief, Bureau of Communicable Diseases

I am happy to introduce **Craig Wilson** in his new role as STD and Viral Hepatitis Section Administrator in the Bureau of Communicable Diseases, Division of Disease Control and Health Protection. Craig brings over 20 years of public health experience to this position starting as a disease intervention specialist in Pinellas County.

He has experience in other county health department programs related to communicable diseases, reproductive health, maternal and child health, accreditation and community planning. In addition to working in an urban, metro county like Pinellas, Craig has also managed programs in Madison and Jefferson Counties. He most recently served as the statewide Director of the Office of Rural Health in Tallahassee.

Craig's broad experience in local and statewide public health gives him a solid base to build strong partnerships for the prevention of STDs and viral hepatitis. Thank you for giving him your support.



Craig Wilson

## William Hall Joins DOH-Polk

By Leroy Dux, Hepatitis Prevention Program Coordinator



William Hall

Please welcome our new Hepatitis Program nurse, Mr. **William "Buzz" Hall**. He is replacing the recently retired June Blum and will be working closely with Pamela Richardson to learn the ropes for the hepatitis unit.

William is a professional registered nurse with over 20 years of working in acute, long term and ambulatory care. His health care experience includes staff nursing, management/administration, education and entrepreneurship.

William is a native of Polk County and a graduate of Polk Community College and Florida Southern College. When not traveling, he enjoys rehabbing houses, camping, reading science fiction and spending time with family.

## Hepatitis Testing Day

From the CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and May 19 is National Hepatitis Testing Day. Hepatitis Testing Day is an opportunity to remind health care providers and the public who should be tested for viral hepatitis. Millions of Americans have chronic viral hepatitis and most of them do not know they are infected. Remember:

- Hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are all different diseases and spread in different ways;
- Chronic hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer; and
- Getting tested could save your life.

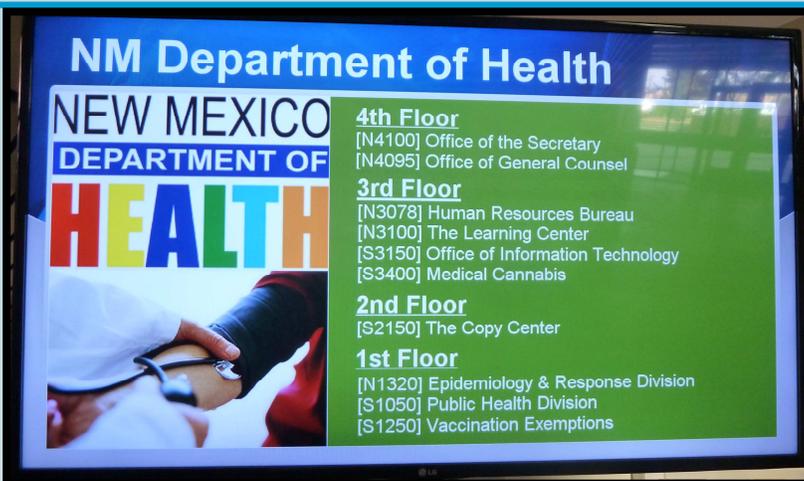


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## New Mexico DOH

By Donna Wheeler

On a vacation in October 2015, I had the pleasure of meeting Dominick Zurlo, MA, Hepatitis and Harm Reduction Program Manager in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Dominick spends a considerable amount of time on the road throughout his state. He teaches and counsels in all 43 health department facilities within 33 counties, 17 of which are still considered “pioneer counties.”



We spent time chatting about our respective hepatitis prevention efforts and New Mexico’s Harm Reduction Program (NM Statute-1997). This program

works to reduce drug-related harm while enhancing individual, family and community wellness primarily through the provision of linguistically appropriate and culturally competent services to injection drug users (IDUs). Some of their many services include syringe exchanges, overdose prevention and Naloxone distribution, auricular detoxification treatment, primary medical care and referrals. Target populations are IDUs and those who use other drugs like crack-cocaine, commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, the homeless and ex-prisoners.



From left: Donna Wheeler, Dominick Zurlo and Mitchell LeBlanc

Dominick gave me a copy of the *Hepatitis and Harm Reduction Certification Specialist Manual, HIV/HCV Counselor Training Manual* and directions to a new zip line north of Taos in Angel Fire. To say the least, it was a very productive day.



New Mexico DOH

For more information on the New Mexico Department of Health, visit: [nmhealth.org/](http://nmhealth.org/).

## Looking Back at Hepatitis Prevention in Florida in 2015

By Phil Reichert

Through the Department of Health’s Hepatitis Prevention Program (HPP), several activities, initiatives and accomplishments were made in Florida in 2015.

The HPP staff in Tallahassee hosted Hepatitis Awareness Day at the Capitol on March 16. Health education literature and verbal information was provided by health education coordinator, April Crowley, and community partner, Pam Langford, who is the Hepatitis Education and Liver Support (HEALS) of the South executive director. Several local health offices (LHO) observed National Hepatitis Testing Day (May 19) and World Hepatitis Day (July 28) in 2015 by sponsoring events that included offering hepatitis vaccines and testing.

**Donna Wheeler**, HPP field services coordinator, provided four technical assistance and training visits to local health offices in 2015. Included were site visits to Liberty, Calhoun, Jackson and Taylor Counties.

*This article is continued on page 4.*

## Looking Back on 2015 continued from page 3.

Providing four to six technical assistance and training site visits to the field each year is one of the 33 objectives of the HPP action plan.

**Jessi Embleton** took over the daily tracking of vaccines for the CDC Vaccine Grant when Cindy Kruty left for Jacksonville in November 2014. This grant ended in September 2015, but Jessi continued to track the vaccines until all were used by the seven local health offices that participated in that initiative.

**Maura Comer** began doing viral hepatitis epidemiology work for the STD and Viral Hepatitis Section of the Bureau of Communicable Diseases in February 2015. Maura provides monthly updates on reported cases of hepatitis A, B and C for the bureau's *Monthly Surveillance Report*. The report includes case data for HIV, AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, TB and viral hepatitis. It can be accessed at: [www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/aids/surveillance/\\_documents/msr/2015-msr/index.html](http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/aids/surveillance/_documents/msr/2015-msr/index.html).

**Elizabeth Stewart** joined the HPP in March 2015 and works to complete the deliverables on the CDC hepatitis surveillance grant. She contacts individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 and investigates positive hepatitis C reports for the Young Adult Survey.

The Viral Hepatitis Planning Group met in Tampa in August to discuss the revision of the statewide hepatitis action plan and other viral hepatitis-related issues. Several new members were introduced, and there are currently 17 members who represent both public health and the community.

In 2015, **April Crowley** provided seven Hepatitis 101 webinars for 195 health care workers. In addition, over 100 people around Florida accessed Hepatitis 101 and the Viral Hepatitis Serology web-based training through her efforts and the on-line expertise of Ms. Embleton. April is the HPP health education coordinator (as well as your *Hepatitis Update* editor).

The [www.flahepatitis.org](http://www.flahepatitis.org) website had close to 10,000 visits by nearly 5,000 visitors in 2015. This is important because the public can access information on viral hepatitis training and download educational materials.

In February, rapid testing for hepatitis C resumed in several LHOs around Florida. Funding for this initiative was provided by the Florida Legislature in 2014. From February 1, 2015, through January 31, 2016, there were 2,616 rapid tests performed of which 448 (17.1 percent) were positive. The main advantage to providing a rapid test for a client who is at risk is that they can be counseled about their results in about 20 minutes after providing a blood sample from a simple finger-stick. Blood is drawn from all individuals with a positive rapid hepatitis C test. It is then submitted to the state laboratory for confirmatory testing.

In 2015, the LHOs submitted over 13,700 blood specimens to the state laboratory for hepatitis panel testing. Most were done from January through June, since testing allotments to the LHOs had to be reduced in the second half of the year due to resource limits. As part of the panel testing, there were 13,788 hepatitis C antibody tests performed, of which 1,694 (12.3 percent) were positive.

There were 25,608 chronic hepatitis C cases and 5,229 chronic hepatitis B cases reported in Florida in 2015. Chronic hepatitis C reports have remained nearly level during the three years beginning January 1, 2013, with 25,175 cases reported in 2013 and 25,787 reported in 2014. Chronic hepatitis B has increased from 4,326 reported cases in 2013 to 4,999 reported in 2014.

Finally, 8,786 doses of hepatitis A, B and A/B combination vaccine were provided to individuals at risk for those diseases through the HPP 09 Program in 2015.

## Florida Hepatitis Prevention Program – YEAR IN PICTURES, 2015



February 27: CDC-sponsored Hepatitis C Forum in Tampa (Facilitated by The AIDS Institute--TAI) 1-TAI staff; 2-Dr. Jayaweera from Miami; 3-Group at the forum; 4-Carina Dan from HHS; 5-Audience shot; and 6-Dr. Doug Holt, DOH-Hillsborough



March 16: Hepatitis Awareness Day at the Capitol  
Left: Pam Langford, from HEALS of the South, and April Crowley; Center: Downtown Tallahassee

August 27-28: Viral Hepatitis Planning Group Meeting in Tampa



New to hepatitis surveillance in 2015, Maura Comer (left) and Elizabeth Stewart (center);  
July 29: Jessi & April, seated; and Phil, Elizabeth & Donna, standing (right photo)



July 20-21: CDC Hepatitis C in Persons Who Inject Drugs Consultation Meeting in Atlanta  
Left: Dr. John Ward, Director of CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis; Center: CDC's Global Communications Center; Right: Dr. Scott Holmberg, Chief of Epidemiology & Surveillance at the CDC Division of Viral Hepatitis



Site visits to local health offices; left to right: Calhoun, Jackson, Liberty & Taylor Counties; and Living in the Cut STD initiative in Leon



October 19-21: NASTAD Hepatitis Technical Assistance Meeting in Washington, DC  
1-Dr. Ron Valdiserri, HHS Dpty. Asst. Secretary; 2-US Treasury Bldg.; 3-NASTAD staff (Murray Penner, Exec. Director, left); 4-White House

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## National Viral Hepatitis Meeting in Washington, DC

By Phil Reichert



Phil Reichert

The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) held its fifth meeting of viral hepatitis prevention coordinators (VHPC) in Washington, DC, October 19–21, 2015. NASTAD includes a viral hepatitis program as part of its public health advocacy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds VHPCs in more than 55 state, city and territorial hepatitis prevention programs in the United States. Billed as a technical assistance meeting, NASTAD gathered expertise from several organizations and agencies to provide a forum for discussions about viral hepatitis testing, counseling, treatment, linkage to services and an array of prevention topics.

A major theme running through this meeting was the elimination of hepatitis B and C in the US. In 2006, CDC published a guidance document outlining points for eliminating hepatitis B in the U.S. through vaccination of adults. Most states were already vaccinating infants and children, which protected the younger population against the disease. But, there was a need for a strategy to vaccinate adults. This meeting in Washington provided a place to readdress the discussion of viral hepatitis elimination.

The Institute of Medicine, which is part of the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, is developing a report on the elimination of hepatitis B and C, due to be published in 2016. Incidentally, President Lincoln initially signed a charter creating the National Academy of Sciences to report and provide information on science issues in 1863. The World Health Organization is also developing guidance on the elimination of hepatitis B and C.



Left to right: Chris Taylor, Hepatitis Program Director at NASTAD, and Murray Penner.

Executive Director of NASTAD, Murray Penner, advocated for access to hepatitis C treatment for anyone who needs it and is eligible. He also said that we should increase screening in the U.S. and make confirmatory testing for hepatitis C mandatory.

Another set of discussions which continue in hepatitis prevention circles and at this meeting was the costs associated with treating someone infected with hepatitis C. There is a generic version of sofosbuvir (a product of Gilead that cures nearly 100 percent of all infected individuals who use it) available in India and other developing countries where the cost for 12 weeks of treatment, the standard of care for that drug, is around \$350. In the United States, that same treatment has a retail cost of \$84,000. According to Tracy Swan, a project director with the Treatment Action Group, "Two additional drug combinations should be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2016 for hepatitis C treatment." With competition, treatment costs should decrease. Ms. Swan went on to say, "When looking at the cost of treatment for hepatitis C, compare that to the cost of not treating." She said that doctor visits, tests, hospitalization, transplant and other costs late in the disease process far exceed the cost of treating the disease in its early stages.



Corinna Dan

Corinna Dan, the viral hepatitis policy advisor at the federal Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, DC, has worked to pull agencies together in an effort to develop strategies for addressing viral hepatitis issues. At this meeting, she said, "We should look for opportunities to integrate hepatitis prevention activities into different programs and agencies." She mentioned that the Veteran's Administration (VA) developed a robust hepatitis C surveillance system. A published guidance document for the care and treatment of veterans with hepatitis C is available on the VA website.

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## NASTAD Meeting continued from page 6.



Dr. Holly Hagan

Holly Hagan, a professor from the New York University College of Nursing, stated that in the U.S. 73 percent of all injecting drug users are infected with hepatitis C. “Not only does needle sharing transmit the disease, but also equipment sharing, such as syringes, cotton and cookers,” said Dr. Hagan. After 15 years of injecting drug use, 83 percent of those individuals are infected with hepatitis C.

Dr. John Ward, director of CDC’s Division of Viral Hepatitis for the past ten years, said, “Hepatitis C represents 57 percent of all acute viral hepatitis cases in the United States.” He continued, “There is a 150% increase in acute hepatitis C in the U.S. since 2010.” Most of this is due to opioid abuse. Hepatitis C and HIV cases are rising in rural areas due to the sharing of needles, syringes and other drug equipment.



Dr. John Ward

Information and presentations from the NASTAD hepatitis technical assistance meeting can be downloaded from [www.nastad.org/meetings/2015-nastad-hepatitis-technical-assistance-meeting](http://www.nastad.org/meetings/2015-nastad-hepatitis-technical-assistance-meeting).

## Technical Assistance Site Visits

By Donna Wheeler

The Florida Department of Health in **Nassau County** has three dedicated Hepatitis 09 Program coordinators Sherry Linback, ARNP, Kim Geib and new staff member Debbie Curtis. They keep the program running smoothly in light of rotating staff among the three sites in Nassau County.

I had the pleasure of meeting both Sherry and Debbie in the small, yet busy, Yulee Clinic. Many of Nassau’s new residents are from neighboring counties as opposed to retiring baby boomers from the north. Debbie stated that, “Retirees wanting warmth go a lot further south than Yulee.” In all clinics, Nassau staff firmly believe in education and referrals. Sherry explained they are fortunate to have a local gastroenterologist who will work out payment plans with hepatitis C-positive clients. Sherry stays busy with clinics and participating in community outreach events.



Left to right: Debbie Curtis and Sherry Linback

The Hepatitis 09 Program in **Duval County** is enthusiastically headed up by Dana Henning and Angie Morgan. Seasoned staffers Clement Richardson, Ruth Voss and Muniba McCabe were able to join us in Jacksonville for a recent technical site visit on Wednesday, January 27, 2016.



Duval has a challenging homeless population, hence local health office Director Dr. Kelli Wells has expressed an interest in concentrating outreach efforts in the downtown area of Jacksonville. Our hepatitis prevention team is excited about the myriad of potential opportunities this may present and is ready with a wide variety of educational materials.

Left to right: Muniba McCabe, Dana Henning, Angie Morgan and Ruth Voss