



# Hepatitis Update

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## New Bureau Chief for Communicable Diseases

On August 16, 2013, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) welcomed R. S. “Sterling” Whisenhunt as the new Chief for the Bureau of Communicable Diseases. Mr. Whisenhunt is responsible for overseeing the HIV/AIDS & Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, STD and Immunization sections of the department.



Sterling Whisenhunt

He most recently served in the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) as Director of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Office. Prior to DCF, he was the Interim Deputy Secretary for Statewide Services at DOH, a job that provides oversight for Florida’s 67 county health departments.

A graduate of the University of Alabama, Mr. Whisenhunt began his career as a mental health counselor at Mercy Hospital in Miami. He moved on to epidemiology at the state of Georgia Health Department in Columbus, where he received the Sellers-McCroan Award. This honor is issued each year to recognize and encourage outstanding achievement and service to Georgians in epidemiology and/or laboratory services. He received this award for his 1996 Olympic surveillance efforts.

Mr. Whisenhunt returned to Florida to work at the Miami-Dade County Health Department. He started out as a health service representative and worked his way up to the Program Manager position for the Hepatitis Program. He later became the Epidemiology Manager at Seminole County Health Department.

He has participated in several EPI and STD trainings with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in addition to his involvement in hurricane and disaster preparedness and response activities. He was also recognized on a national level for the duties he performed in the 2001 Anthrax investigation in Palm Beach.

One of Mr. Whisenhunt’s favorite quotes is by Donald Rumsfeld because it describes how he feels about being a part of public health. “Enjoy your time in public service. It may well be one of the most interesting and challenging times of your life.”

*Hepatitis Health Report* is brought to you by the Division of Disease Control & Health Protection, Bureau of Communicable Diseases, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Section at the Florida Department of Health.

If you would like to submit an article along with photos, email the editor at:

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## Poster Presentation

By Phil Reichert

Dena Hall and I presented a poster at the Florida Public Health Association (FPHA) annual conference in Orlando on August 28-30. The poster, titled, *Hepatitis C in Florida: Testing Individuals Born from 1945-1965 (The Baby Boomer Cohort), 2013*, addressed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2012 recommendation to test all people in the U.S. born from 1945 to 1965 for hepatitis C. (The poster appears on page 3.)



In the absence of traditional risk factors for hepatitis C, such as persons who shared drug or tattooing equipment, persons who received a blood transfusion before 1992, occupational exposures and other risks, individuals in this birth cohort should be tested at least one time. In doing so, many people with hepatitis C who may have been infected ten, twenty or thirty years ago, will learn their status and seek medical care.

According to the CDC, up to 75% of those infected with the disease are unaware of their infection. Hepatitis C is the number one cause of liver cancer and liver transplants, but symptoms of the disease may not become evident for several decades.

This one-time testing will reduce mortality and morbidity in Florida and in the U.S. due to hepatitis C.

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## Highlights from the Florida Public Health Association Annual Educational Conference, 2013

By Phil Reichert

The 2013 annual educational conference of the Florida Public Health Association took place August 28-30 in Orlando. There were several take-home messages delivered. Here are a few highlights.

Dr. Dennis Cookro, former Deputy Secretary at the Department of Health, spoke about the future of public health. Several diseases are on the rise in the US and in Florida, such as: dengue fever, pertussis and chronic hepatitis C. These present a challenge to public health professionals. He mentioned several public health successes also, such as: vaccine-preventable diseases like hepatitis A and B, measles and human papilloma virus. He said, "We, as public health professionals, need to remember the three Cs when working with clients: Be cordial, be caring and be compassionate." He said these would also work with lawmakers, when we are asked to describe our programs. Dr. Cookro said that we need to possess technical, fiscal, programmatic and political skills.

Dr. Donna Petersen, Dean of the College of Public Health at the University of South Florida (USF), talked about the history of schools of public health. Until the early part of the twentieth century, masters of public health degrees were always associated with medical schools. Only medical doctors studied this discipline. In 1915, with the release of the Welsh-Rose Report, schools of public health were created, and masters programs were developed for others who worked in the public health field. Johns-Hopkins, in Maryland, became the first institute of higher learning to establish a stand-alone school of public health.

Dr. Kevin Snead, a pharmacy professor at USF, spoke about "patient-centered management." What this means is, when an individual is infected with a disease, such as hepatitis C or some type of cancer, in the near future a finger-stick blood test will be able to predict what and how much medication will work to resolve the disease or condition. He stated, "Ethnic differences and genetics predict how meds will work."

Dr. Douglas Holt, Director of the Department of Health at Hillsborough County, gave the "State of the State" address. He said that people in any given community are most concerned about jobs, quality education and cost of living. To provide public health messages in our communities is a process where we will need to work one day at a time. He said, "It is better to keep someone well than to treat them later." This is basic prevention in action. Dr. Holt went on to state, "Healthier weight through diet and exercise will reduce health care costs significantly." He spoke about Surgeon General Dr. John Armstrong's priority areas regarding healthy weigh, accreditation and reducing cancer.



# Hepatitis C in Florida: Testing Individuals Born from 1945-1965 (The Baby Boomer Cohort), August 2013

Philip E. Reichert, MPH and Cyndena A. Hall

Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Communicable Diseases, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Section

## Statement of Problem

In about 75% to 85% of individuals infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV), chronic disease persists and may lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer or death. Most people with HCV have no discernable symptoms for 20 to 30 years or more. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 75% of all HCV infections occur in Americans born from 1945 to 1965. Known as the "Boomer Cohort," they represent only 27% of the US population. In August 2012, CDC released a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report recommendation titled: *Recommendations for the Identification of Chronic Hepatitis C Virus Infection Among Persons Born During 1945-1965*. In this report, CDC recommended a one-time test for Americans in the boomer cohort.

## Objective

Provide Florida-related data to support CDC's recommendation that Floridians born from 1945-1965 should be tested for HCV even in the absence of traditional risk factors (such as: persons who share drug or tattooing equipment, blood transfusion before 1992, occupational exposures, etc.)

## Description of Program

Offer HCV testing to persons born from 1945-1965 in private and public health settings, including sexually transmitted disease clinics, family health, HIV, and other service settings.

Figure # 1

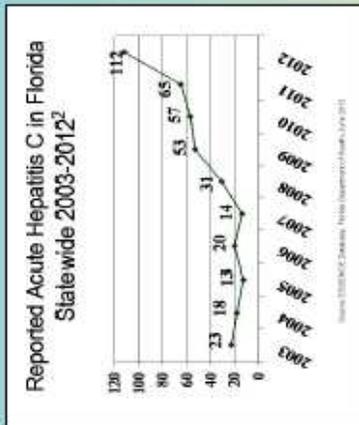


Figure # 3

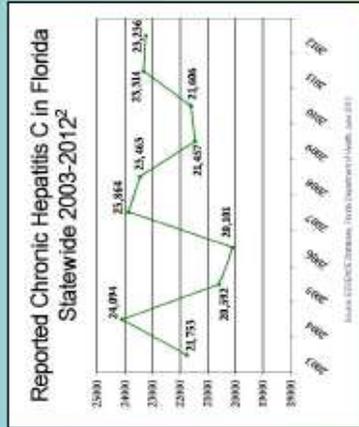
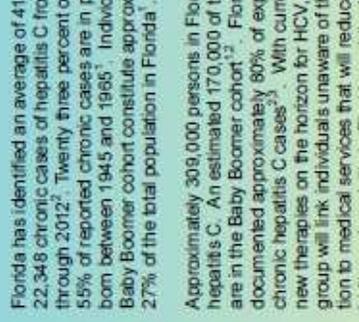


Figure # 4



## Summary and Conclusion

Florida has identified an average of 41 acute and 22,348 chronic cases of hepatitis C from 2003 through 2012<sup>1</sup>. Twenty three percent of acute and 55% of reported chronic cases are in persons born between 1945 and 1965<sup>2</sup>. Individuals in the Baby Boomer cohort constitute approximately 27% of the total population in Florida<sup>3</sup>. Approximately 309,000 persons in Florida have hepatitis C. An estimated 170,000 of those cases are in the Baby Boomer cohort<sup>4</sup>. Florida has documented approximately 80% of expected chronic hepatitis C cases<sup>5</sup>. With current and new therapies on the horizon for HCV, testing this group will link individuals unaware of their infection to medical services that will reduce HCV morbidity and mortality in Florida and the U.S.

Figure # 2

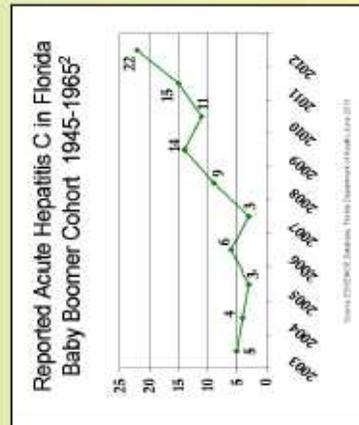
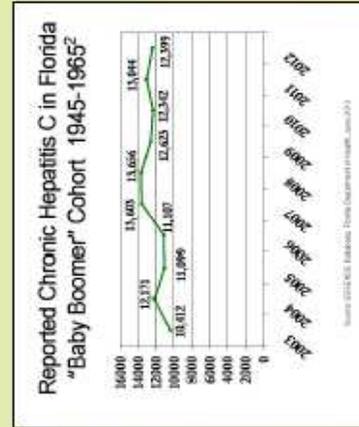


Figure # 4



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# World Hepatitis Day in Collier County

By Isidra Gomes, Health Services Supervisor, Florida Department of Health-Collier County

Below is a flyer we created and distributed around our county promoting World Hepatitis Day. As an added bonus to offering free hepatitis testing, we also provided HIV and STD screenings the entire week of July 22, 2013, at the health department and at other venues in the community.



## Do you know?

One in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or C, and yet the majority of those infected are unaware.



**Free Rapid HIV Testing,  
Hepatitis & STD Screenings  
Collier County Health Dept.  
JULY 24 & 25  
Walk-Ins Welcome  
239 - 252 - 8593**

**World Hepatitis  
Day**

**JULY 28, 2013**

Visit [www.aminumber12.org](http://www.aminumber12.org) and find out if you're at risk.

# World Hepatitis Day in Tallahassee

By April Crowley

On Sunday, July 28, 2013, organizations around the globe observed World Hepatitis Day. In Tallahassee, HEALS (Hepatitis Education, Awareness and Liver Support) of the South celebrated by helping break a Guinness World Record for the most number of people doing the “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” actions around the world in a 24-hour period. This year the World Hepatitis Alliance concentrated on two main themes:

- **This is hepatitis. Know it. Confront it:** This focuses on the real-life impact of viral hepatitis.
- **See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil:** The message from this theme is that hepatitis is being ignored around the world.



This group performed the “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” feat at Lake Ella Park in Tallahassee.

Pam Langford, president of HEALS of the South, a non-profit organization, organized the event at Lake Ella, a popular local park. Pam is an active advocate for viral hepatitis. In addition to facilitating a hepatitis support group, Pam provides extensive information and support to online hepatitis groups. She maintains the following website: [www.HEALSofttheSouth.org](http://www.HEALSofttheSouth.org).



Pam Langford



Left to right are witnesses for the event: Leon County Sheriff Deputy Becky Reis, City of Tallahassee Firefighters Troy Marks, Lance Raines, David DeLoach and Leon County Sheriff Deputy Jeff Hibbert.

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## QI Visit to Gadsden County

By Donna Wheeler, Field Services Coordinator

Recently, I had the pleasure of going on a quality improvement (QI) site visit to the Florida Department of Health in Gadsden County.

Like so many counties, Gadsden does not receive specific categorical hepatitis funding. However, hepatitis prevention services such as testing, vaccination, counseling and referrals, are performed despite limited work space. Extremely cohesive work groups are evident at the county health department (CHD). Everyone multi-tasks with no apparent silos.

Collaboration within the clinic, among staff and within the community is ongoing to include outreach efforts, health fairs and activities with community-based organizations (CBOs). Hepatitis risk assessments are available and are used inside and outside of the clinic.

Nursing Director Sarah Hinson created educational binders for the staff to provide a quick reference for hepatitis information. Sarah is educating staff, consumers and private providers on hepatitis prevention. Educational efforts are superb both in and out of the CHD. Thanks to Sarah's ongoing efforts, private physicians in Gadsden County are learning to understand the importance of hepatitis testing.

Hepatitis educational materials are on display in the CHD waiting area and in each visitation room. Many of the fact sheets and brochures they utilize are downloaded from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website.

These are just a few examples of the excellent team work that's happening in Gadsden County. Thank you for your service in helping prevent viral hepatitis.



Donna Wheeler



Left to right: Region II STD Coordinator Dale Harrison, Gadsden County Operations Manager Maximo Martinez, Nursing Director Sarah Hinson and Area 2B Florida HIV/AIDS Program Coordinator Leroy Jackson

# Technical Assistance Site Visits

By April Crowley

A short time ago, Phil Reichert and Donna Wheeler provided technical assistance site visits to the Departments of Health in Collier, Lee and Pinellas Counties. The purpose of these site visits is to help the staff take stock of where they are in hepatitis prevention activities and where they want to go in the future. A technical assistance visit is not evaluative. Rather, it represents efforts by the visiting team to fine tune services, provide updates and engage in dialogue regarding local, state and national viral hepatitis activities.

What Phil and Donna discovered on their trip is the fact that all three counties have promising practices and are going the extra mile by implementing exceptional services. Each health department integrates hepatitis services into other programs such as immunization, HIV/AIDS, TB and STD. They also collaborate with the community in providing outreach to local jails, churches, drug treatment facilities, homeless shelters and other organizations.



Komona McGriff (sitting) and Diana Prat with Lee County.



Standing left to right: Eduardo Rodriguez, Niurka Martinez and Renato Cardenas. Sitting left to right: Isidra Gomes and Nilda Proenza with Collier County.



Pinellas staff left to right Salvatore Lopiccolo, Jackie Mungo, John Chamulak, Lisa Cohen, Sharon Caruthers, Dante Ross, Ashley Scott and Dr. Dongming Cui.

## QI in Citrus County

By Donna Wheeler

In August, I visited the Florida Department of Health in Citrus County and learned some interesting facts. This county health department (CHD) grew from a one-room office in 1950 to five buildings by 2007, and from a staff of four to a staff of 150. They currently serve a county population of over 14,000 people.

Citrus is a CHD that does not receive categorical hepatitis prevention funding, although hepatitis prevention activities are integrated into all of their clinics. Currently, their focus is on vaccinating people who are at risk for hepatitis B. And, their vaccine accountability is at 100 percent! They are another great example of people who do a lot with limited resources.

The CHD performs well and provides several hepatitis prevention services under the guidance of Freta Dunn, the epidemiology and immunization senior clerk. Internal efforts for risk reduction education are underway and are being exercised at all opportunities. The staff all exercise solid communications among every clinic.

All services are available daily from 7:00 am to 5:30 pm. Exemplary follow-up is performed by using a programmable automated phone call-back system and automated letters and postcards. All hepatitis B and C positive clients are referred to Shands Hospital in Gainesville and/or local private medical doctors for treatment.



Community Health Nursing Supervisor Debra Hart (left) and Epidemiology Immunization Senior Clerk Freta Dunn.

## Chronic Hepatitis B and C in Florida

By Cyndena Hall, Research and Surveillance Coordinator

The Hepatitis Prevention Program's functions include monthly monitoring of Merlin case reports for chronic hepatitis B and C. This year, we are seeing an increasing number of cases of viral hepatitis in some counties.

### Hepatitis B

In 2012 Florida reported a total of 4,068 cases of chronic hepatitis B, an increase of 144 cases over 2011. Based on CDC estimates, approximately 77,300 persons in Florida are chronically infected with the hepatitis B virus and many have no idea that they are infected. From January 1, 2013 through August 31, 2013, Florida recorded 2,985 cases of chronic hepatitis B infection, an increase of 254 cases over the same time period in 2012. Some of our smaller counties have reached or exceeded the number of chronic hepatitis B cases reported for all of 2012 as of August 31, 2013. If the current trend continues, Florida could report as many as 4,478 new cases of chronic hepatitis B this year.

### Hepatitis C

In 2012 Florida reported a total of 23,236 cases of chronic hepatitis C. Statewide, Florida reported approximately two thousand more cases of chronic hepatitis C from January 1 through August 31, 2013 than it did during the same time frame in 2012. As of August 31, 2013, some counties have already reached or exceeded the number of chronic hepatitis C cases reported for all of 2012. While normally we average approximately 22,000 to 23,000 cases per year, at present Florida is on track to report up to 25,000 new cases of chronic hepatitis C this year. According to CDC estimates, at least 310,000 Floridians may be infected with chronic hepatitis C. Since Florida began tracking and reporting chronic hepatitis C infections in 2000, a total of 255,829 cases have been identified. According to our data, an average of 500 persons per year die as a result of viral hepatitis B and C.

The Hepatitis Prevention Program produces monthly hepatitis B and C reports. Copies may be requested by contacting me at 850-245-4444, x2589, or [Cyndena.Hall@FIHealth.gov](mailto:Cyndena.Hall@FIHealth.gov).