



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Peter O'Neill
(702) 242-7156

Healthcare professionals join forces to fight antibiotic resistance

Las Vegas (August 8, 2001) - In an effort to educate both healthcare professionals and the public in Nevada about the seriousness of antibiotic resistance, the Clark County Health District and Health Plan of Nevada have joined with other public and private agencies/companies to form the "Nevadans for Antibiotic Awareness" (NAA) task force. The public announcement of the task force and its education campaign will take place at the task force's next meeting on Friday, August 10th, from 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. in the Clark County Health District auditorium at 625 Shadow Lane.

Antibiotics are an important tool for fighting infections caused by bacteria. However, due to bacterial resistance to the drugs, many common infections can no longer be easily treated. In the most serious of situations, this resistance can render antibiotics ineffective at controlling certain potentially life-threatening infections. Each year more bacteria develop resistance to these life-saving drugs. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), antibiotic resistance is a significant public health problem worldwide.

The goal of NAA is to increase public awareness, educate the public and medical providers to the dangers of inappropriate antibiotic use, and work as a statewide team to try and halt the development of these resistant bacteria. Participants in the task force include physicians, microbiologists, pharmacists, hospital infection control practitioners, healthcare companies, and state and local health officials. NAA is comprised of over 30 public and private agencies/companies committed to reducing the spread of antibiotic resistance in Nevada by decreasing inappropriate use and improving infection control.

-MORE-

Christine Petersen, M.D., chief medical officer, Sierra Health Services, parent company of Health Plan of Nevada, is chairman of the NAA public awareness subcommittee. According to Dr. Petersen, “In Nevada we have an increasing number of antibiotic resistant bacterial strains occurring in both the in-patient and out-patient setting. These resistant strains can be difficult to treat and may require lengthy hospitalizations.” According to the CDC, over the past five years, the rate of resistance to penicillin for the common bacterial strain *Streptococcus pneumoniae* has increased nationwide by more than 300%.

The task force is divided into four subcommittees; surveillance, infection control, public awareness and provider intervention. To date, the task force has developed the healthcare guidelines and begun provider education, distributed materials to child care centers and, with pro-bono services provided by Virgen Advertising, developed a statewide public awareness campaign to be rolled out in the fall of this year.

“To effectively reduce antibiotic resistance in Nevada, the effort must be community wide,” said Dr. Donald Kwalick, chief health officer for the Clark County Health District. “We need to raise awareness among health professionals and the public-at-large and felt this task force was a step in the right direction.”

In addition to the Clark County Health District and Health Plan of Nevada, current members include the State of Nevada Health Division, Washoe Health Systems, University of Nevada School of Medicine, PacifiCare, Health Insight, Sunrise Hospital, Desert Springs Hospital, St. Mary’s Hospital, Integrated Healthcare Services, Virgen Advertising, pharmaceutical vendors and many others.

Medical professionals/other interested parties who wish to obtain more information on antibiotic resistance or NAA, contact NAA Executive Director Donna Riddle at (702) 383-1378.

#####