

LifeLines

SPRING 2019

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NEW HORIZONS

This spring, Prism Health North Texas opened its new Oak Lawn Center, a state-of-the-art center offering personalized sexual wellness services for the community.

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CEO ADDRESS

By John T. Carlo, MS, MD
Chief Executive Officer

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR, we announced our South Dallas Health Center is expanding services through the creation of a walk-in clinic to treat common sexually transmitted infections or STI's in addition to HIV prevention and treatment. The inspiration for this new effort came from the troubling reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that Dallas County experiences some of the highest rates of STI's in the nation such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis. The Dallas Morning News writes, "Unfortunately, in a region of great prosperity, [STI's] are major problems in pockets of our community and indications that current strategies have come up short."

The South Dallas Health Center is located in and around zip codes that experience the highest rates of new HIV infections, the highest rates of new STI's, and the shortest overall life expectancy compared to zip codes just a few miles away. The Interstate 30 highway divides Dallas, cutting a line across areas that all but ensure one needs to be in a car or bus in order to reach the other side. Only two hospitals and very few medical clinics are located to the south of I-30, despite the high degree of unmet health needs. In these neighborhoods that lack grocery stores, pharmacies, and other vital services, we are partnering with a number of nonprofit organizations who specialize in housing, healthy food access, workforce training, education, and transportation in order to impact change in this area. Our role in providing comprehensive sexual healthcare services is proving to be a vital contribution.



In addition to the great risk untreated STI's have in promoting even more infections, having an STI greatly increases one's risk of acquiring an HIV infection. In our recent announcement event, Dr. Deborah Morris-Harris, our Chief Medical Officer explains, "an untreated sexually transmitted infection is an unfortunate gateway for a HIV infection." Using this as a call to action, our dedicated team put together necessary steps so that we can add additional walk-in patients without

“An untreated sexually transmitted infection is an unfortunate gateway for a HIV infection.”

— Dr. Deborah Morris-Harris

disrupting our already busy clinic schedule. Our marketing team worked closely with neighborhood community leaders to promote the opening by an event entitled, "Loving My Body: Empowering through Art & Health."

Once step at a time, we continue to strive towards achieving health equity in communities with high unmet needs. A strong dedication by staff enables continued advancements and changes that continue to reach more and more people. As a supporter, you are a vital in making sure we can continue in efforts like these, and I hope that you continue to be with us as we build even more opportunities going forward! 🌈

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6 TIPS FOR REDUCING TECH-RELATED STRESS

We've never been more connected than we are today. Most American adults not only own a cell phone, but 90 percent keep it close by, and 45 percent rarely turn their phone off, according to a recent survey from the Pew Research Center.¹ Many of us even sleep with our phones.²

But such constant connectivity is really stressing us out: A 2017 study from the American Psychological Association found that people who frequently check their phones have significantly higher stress levels than those who spend less time with their gadgets.³ Among people in their young 20s, high cell phone use has been linked not only to higher stress, but trouble sleeping and mental health issues.⁴ Over time, that chronic stress can take a serious physical toll, weakening our immune systems and increasing the chance of illnesses.

So how can we cope with the stress that accompanies our plugged-in lifestyles? "The trick is to take charge of how we react to stressors," explains Rochelle Turner, Program Manager at Prism Health North Texas. From taking short strolls to digital hiatuses, here are some strategies to help you unplug and recharge.

1 ASSESS YOUR HABITS. Are you constantly checking your email long after work hours? How long do you spend looking at social media accounts or scrolling your newsfeed? "These negative stimuli can increase stress and anxiety," Turner says. "Taking stock of how much you're interacting with them is a good first step towards reducing stress."

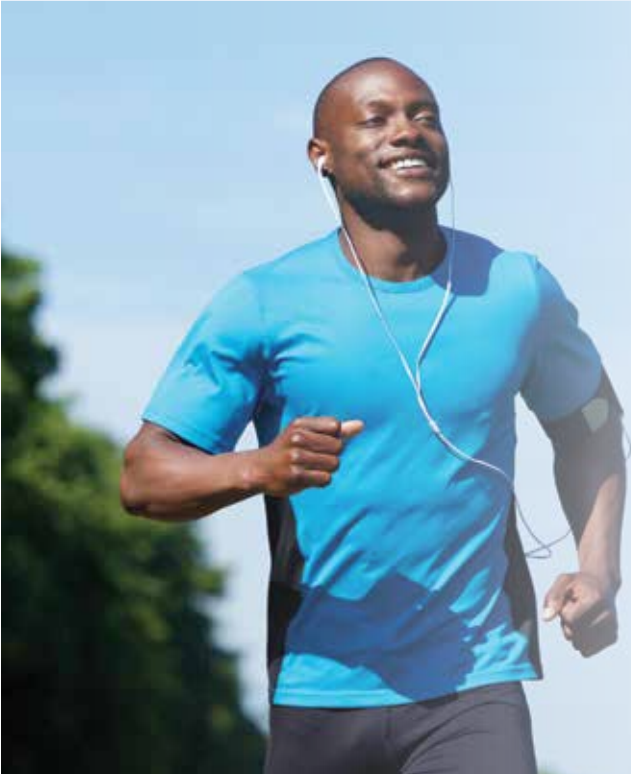
2 GET SLEEP. Studies show that using technology close to bedtime can affect how long it takes us to fall asleep and the quality of sleep we get.⁵ Poor sleep, in turn, has been linked to everything from weight gain to metabolic diseases, and can impact our ability to deal with stress.⁶ Turner says the best solution is to power down electronics in the hour leading up to bed and to keep your bedroom electronics-free.

3 EAT WELL AND EXERCISE. Eating three nutritious meals a day doesn't just keep your body energized; it boosts your mood.⁷ Regular exercise, meanwhile, can decrease tension and counteract insomnia. Even five minutes of exercise can have anti-anxiety effects.⁸ If you take care of your basic needs, Turner says, your body will respond better to stress.

4 CONNECT OFFLINE. At best, technology has made it easier for us to connect with one another. At worst, it's made it more difficult.⁹ "Spending quality time with family and friends is essential to our wellbeing," Turner says. "Ask yourself: Are you nurturing your important relationships?"

5 STOP MULTITASKING. While we may think we're expert multitaskers, our brains aren't wired to do five things at once. In fact, research shows that splitting your focus can decrease productivity. What's more: multitasking can trigger your body's release of stress hormones.¹⁰ Turner's advice? "Stay calm and focus on the task at hand."

6 BE PRESENT. "Mindfulness" has become a popular term in recent years. But it doesn't have be a confusing concept. "It's about making a conscious effort to be relaxed n the present moment, and can be as simple as taking a deep breath or going for a walk outside" Turner explains. At a time when our lives are saturated with media, "mindful practices quiet our minds and can help us release negative energy." 🌈



¹<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/26/americans-views-on-mobile-etiquette/>
²https://www.huffpost.com/entry/smartphone-behavior-2015_n_7690448
³<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/02/checking-devices>
⁴<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3042390/>
⁵<https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/health/smartphones-harm-sleep/index.html>
⁶<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/10/02/555054483/how-messing-with-our-body-clocks-can-raise-alarms-with-health>
⁷<https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition-pictures/how-to-reduce-stress-with-diet.aspx>
⁸<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469>
⁹<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0013916514539755>
¹⁰<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/is-multitasking-bad/>



New Horizons

THIS SPRING, PRISM HEALTH NORTH TEXAS OPENED ITS NEW OAK LAWN CENTER, A STATE-OF-THE-ART CENTER OFFERING PERSONALIZED SEXUAL WELLNESS SERVICES FOR THE COMMUNITY.

Since Prism Health North Texas first opened in 1986, the organization has been at the forefront of HIV treatment in Dallas, consistently providing residents with reliable and affordable access to patient-focused healthcare no matter their age, race, or gender. Now PHNTX is cementing its place as leaders in non-reproductive sexual wellness services: On May 20th, 2019 PHNTX will proudly open the doors to the Oak Lawn Center, a state-of-the-art facility specially designed to provide fast, convenient access to sexual wellness services.

Located at 2801 Lemmon Ave, Dallas, TX 75204 the Oak Lawn Center will deliver non-occupational PrEP, as well as everything from STI treatment to behavioral health counseling to educational resources. It will also be no-appointment-needed center where patients can drop in quickly and easily receive testing and treatment for STIs.

Neighborhood in Need

Two years ago, PHNTX adopted a new name to reflect its expanded mission—one that encompassed HIV treatment as well as prevention, education, and research. Around the same time, PHNTX leaders recognized a need to expand physically as well. Not only had the organization's two clinics in Oak Cliff and South Dallas nearly filled to capacity, but HIV and STI rates in Dallas were among the highest in the country, representing a growing public health crisis.



In 2016, the HIV diagnosis rate in Dallas had reached 31.7 per 100,000 people. Approximately 17,333 people in Dallas County were living with HIV—an increase of 57% within a decade—and STI rates were soaring.¹ But the Dallas County Health Department was struggling to meet the community's needs.

Responding to the county's climbing

HIV rates, PHNTX's leaders decided to open a 3rd medical center to broaden the organization's capacity and reach. They conceived of a new center that would offer PrEP services and STI testing in underserved communities. But to maximize impact, choosing the right location would be crucial. They turned to data for answers.

While combing through clinic records, PHNTX's leaders noticed a trend: Many patients at the South Dallas and Oak Cliff Health Centers were coming from the Oak Lawn area. Zip-code level data mirrored their findings: At almost 2%, Oak Lawn had one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the county.

"We realized there's an especially high rate of HIV among men who have sex

with men in that neighborhood," says Dr. Deborah Morris-Harris, CMO of PHNTX. "Young black men who have sex with men are particularly at risk: their incidence rate of HIV is 47.2 per 100,000. STI data also revealed that the area is particularly high-risk."

Together, this information made clear that Oak Lawn represented one of the best opportunities not just to attract a diverse patient population, but to introduce treatment and prevention programs to a community that could tremendously benefit from them.

A Patient-First Approach

The Oak Lawn Center was designed with patients' needs in mind—namely privacy and efficiency, says Dr. John Carlo, CEO of PHNTX. "Because PrEP visits must be made more frequently, we want the center to be as patient-friendly and time-limited as possible," he says. Inviting seating will line the waiting room, where nook spaces offer private, enclosed areas for patients to await their appointments. To ensure patients' anonymity, appointment check-ins will be managed via text message. And a convenient location with dedicated parking will allow patients to come and go quickly.

Patients' needs also drove the design of the new center's healthcare services. According to Victoria Langston, Clinic Administrator, patients at the Oak Lawn Center will receive cutting-edge care from highly trained medical providers, including Dr. Rasha Ghurani, M.D., as well as a team of nurses and medical case managers—all of whom will work together to create personalized, holistic treatment plans.

But one of the most exciting features of the new facility is its "status-neutral" approach to care. "We know that when it comes to lowering HIV rates and minimizing the spread of HIV, prevention is just as important as treatment. We're excited to offer everyone the same options regardless of HIV status," Langston explains. "Our goal is to help people who are HIV-negative stay that way by helping them better manage their sexual health."

When followed every day, PrEP can reduce

the transmission of HIV. But not many people are aware of it, says Langston. That's why, at the Oak Lawn Center, prevention and education will go hand-in-hand. "At other clinics, patients might get treated for an STI and then leave with no follow-up care," she says. "Instead, we'll give patients information about reducing risky behavior and help them outline plans for routine testing and treatment." The goal is simple: get people engaged in prevention programs early.

Looking Ahead

PHNTX is excited to bring its unique brand of personalized care to a new neighborhood at a moment that could mark a turning point for patients across Dallas County. "Depending on where you live, you may not have access to a medical provider who understands HIV," says Langston. "We're thrilled to open the Oak Lawn Center because it expands our ability to see folks who could otherwise be forgotten within the healthcare system."

PHNTX recognizes that increasing access to care means more than providing a convenient location; affordability is also key. That's why the Oak Lawn Center, like PHNTX's other two clinics, will offer financial assistance and dedicated case managers who will help patients receive care—even if they have low or no income. The clinic will provide cash-based STI services on sliding-fee scale as well.

Dr. Carlo believes that eventually, the Oak Lawn Center could help reduce the incidence of new STIs in Dallas County by as much as 10-20% over the next five to ten years. As for HIV, he says, PHNTX continues to work towards UNAID's "90-90-90" target: that by 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV will know their status, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

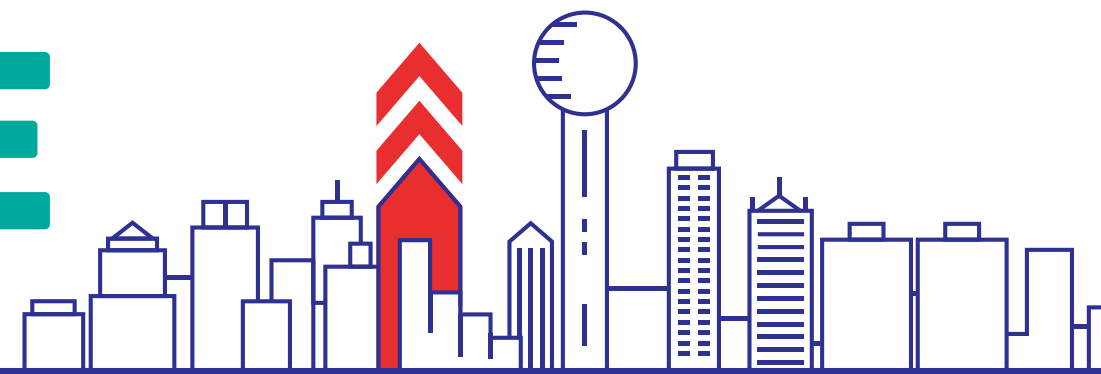
By providing a convenient location and removing barriers to care, the Oak Lawn Center will be an essential partner in stemming the HIV epidemic and building a healthier community. "They're lofty goals," says Dr. Carlo, "but they're achievable ones." 🌈

“WE’RE THRILLED TO OPEN THE OAK LAWN CENTER BECAUSE IT EXPANDS OUR ABILITY TO SEE FOLKS WHO COULD OTHERWISE BE FORGOTTEN WITHIN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.”
— Victoria Langston, Clinic Administrator

¹<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2018/06/27/dallas-must-step-fight-hiv-aids>

STIs ON THE RISE

A new report reveals a staggering increase in Dallas County STI rates—and new opportunities for Prism Health North Texas



The statistics are concerning: Dallas County experienced the nation's highest percentage increase of cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea between 2016-2017, according to a recent Health Testing Centers analysis of the 2017 Surveillance Report by the Centers for Disease Control. The report presents a sobering picture of sexual health in the U.S., where rising STI rates highlight an urgent need for greater access to sexual healthcare and comprehensive strategies to promote STI testing, diagnosis, and treatment.

In Dallas County, chlamydia diagnoses rose to 19,000 cases in 2017—a dramatic 25% increase over the previous year. Gonorrhea climbed to 7,500 cases, up 23%, while syphilis cases numbered 400.¹

The sharp uptick in STI rates in Dallas County parallels a national trend. With nearly 2.3 million cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis diagnosed in 2017, STI rates have spiked to record highs in the U.S. And while all three diseases are treatable, most continue to go undiagnosed.

That's a serious problem, says Dr. Deborah Morris-Harris, CMO of Prism Health North Texas. "In the long-term, these infections can lead to severe health consequences," she says. "If left untreated, chlamydia—which often presents no symptoms—can cause reproductive damage and infertility and also increases susceptibility to HIV." Untreated syphilis, meanwhile, can cause damage to cardiovascular systems and the brain.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

In Dallas County and nationwide, STI rates are disproportionately higher among young people and minorities, says Dr. Philip Huang, Director of the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department (DCHHS). All three STIs are most prevalent among 15- to 24-year-olds.

Black and Hispanic females under 25 accounted for the majority of chlamydia diagnoses, the most commonly transmitted STI, in Dallas County in 2017. The largest percentage of the county's syphilis diagnoses occurred in males; 41% of people diagnosed were black. Gonorrhea diagnoses were highest among black males and females, just under half of which occurred in people under 25.²

WHY ARE STI RATES INCREASING?

With better testing, treatment options, and public awareness, STI rates had been generally decreasing nationwide for decades. In 2000, for example, the rate of new cases of syphilis plummeted to its lowest level since the CDC first began reporting in 1941, and the disease was close to being eradicated.³ So why have we slid so far backwards?

The reasons are difficult to pinpoint, says Dr. Huang. Many factors could account for the increases, from new social media apps that facilitate anonymous sex to reduced condom use among sexually active young people—a trend that can perhaps be traced back to decreased federal funding for the CDC. Without strong resources, he says, many public health education campaigns and STI clinics have lacked the financial backing or manpower they need to be truly effective.

What's more, publicly funded STI clinics nationwide have struggled to keep their doors open thanks to declining federal funding. The CDC estimates that in 2012, more than half of all state and local STI programs saw cuts to their budgets, which resulted in reduced screenings and treatment of STIs and HIV. As clinics have closed across the U.S., patients have had less access to sexual healthcare.

Socioeconomic factors can also impact STI prevalence. Rates of chlamydia, for example, are highest in Dallas County

among young black and Hispanic females. This illustrates a broader trend that Dr. Huang explains is indicative of diminished access to healthcare in poorer, marginalized communities. Dr. Morris-Harris agrees, observing that without Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, Texas has the highest rate of uninsured people in the nation. "Poor and uninsured patients have fewer options for care."

Dr. Morris-Harris offers another possible explanation for increasing STI rates in some populations: medical advances against HIV that are prompting people to ditch condoms in favor of riskier behavior. "We know that 'treatment as prevention' (or 'undetectable is untransmissible') works, so condom use may be decreasing among people who are virally suppressed," she says. The same effect could be at play for people on PrEP, she says. According to PHNTX data, STI rates are 2-3 times higher among people on PrEP than among people already infected with HIV.

At the same time, DCHHS has had difficulty providing treatment to these growing numbers of patients. Before Dr. Huang stepped into his role as Director in February 2019, the STI clinic was turning away as many as 200-400 people each month over the last two years due to a lack of available appointments.

PARTNERS IN HEALTH

The HTC report's findings underscore the need for better STI testing and treatment and more well-rounded safe-sex education community-wide. But getting STI rates under control in Dallas County is a complex task: In addition to increasing access to care in chronically underserved neighborhoods, confronting high STI rates in Dallas County entails overcoming social norms, including lax attitudes towards condom use and the stigmas surrounding STIs.

PHNTX is working to do just that. Last month, PHNTX launched a new STI clinic in its South Dallas clinic that provides walk-in appointments for STI testing and treatment. The newly opened Oak Lawn Center will also offer comprehensive STI treatment and PrEP services. Both clinics will provide treatment on a cash and insurance basis, increasing access to affordable, high-quality healthcare in neighborhoods with some of the county's highest STI rates.

"We're also aiming to create accepting spaces where people can be treated without judgment," says Victoria Langston, the clinic administrator at PHNTX. "Stigma is serious, and we want patients to feel comfortable knowing they'll be treated with kindness and compassion."

Dr. Huang stresses that combating the high STI rates in Dallas County will require collaboration: Local healthcare organizations, he explains, must work together to ensure better access and challenge social stigmas.

That's why Dr. Huang is excited to work alongside "tremendous partners" like PHNTX to provide patient-centered care. PHNTX, in turn, is proud to continue to partner with DCHHS, which recently merged its HIV clinic with the Sexual Health Clinic to accommodate more patients and increase community-wide access to sexual health services.

PHNTX is optimistic that with more clinics offering inclusive, affordable options for sexual healthcare, tangible change is possible in North Texas. "These are difficult issues with many causes," says Dr. Huang. "It takes a whole community to really make an impact." 🌈

¹<https://www.keranews.org/post/sexually-transmitted-disease-rates-surge-20-plus-percent-dallas-county>

²<https://www.dallascounty.org/Assets/uploads/docs/hhs/stdstats/STI2017DiseaseProfileDCHHS.pdf>

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