

Merck Company Foundation Announces HIV Care Collaborative with Atlanta, Houston and Philadelphia Health Departments

WHITEHOUSE STATION, N.J., Jul. 19 /CSRwire/ - The Merck Company Foundation announces the launch of a three-year, \$3 million initiative that will support the health departments in Atlanta, Houston and Philadelphia to connect more people living with HIV in these high-burden communities to the care they need to stay healthy. The initiative will be launched with program partners on Sunday, July 22, 2012 at the start of the XIX International AIDS Conference.

The HIV Care Collaborative for Underserved Populations in the United States aligns with President Obama's National HIV/AIDS Strategy's goals which include entering and retaining more patients in care and is designed to support existing programs that have the greatest potential to reduce new HIV infections. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection, with 50,000 new infections each year. A third of Americans with known HIV infections are not receiving health care and 20 to 40 percent of patients fail to establish care within six months of receiving an HIV-positive diagnosis.

"Too many people living with HIV/AIDS are not getting the health care they need to stay healthy and contribute to healthy communities," said Geralyn S. Ritter, senior vice president, Global Public Policy & Corporate Responsibility, Merck & Co., Inc. and president, The Merck Company Foundation. "Merck has a long-standing commitment to expanding access to health care and helping respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the HIV Care Collaborative reinforces this commitment here in the United States."

Each of the selected health departments will receive up to \$1 million over three years, to enhance existing efforts and foster other innovative approaches to better serve people living with HIV/AIDS and prevent its further spread. The communities will address local provider-based and health system challenges and will regularly come together as a group to discuss their work, promising practices, and the common problems and unique challenges they face.

The Collaborative, with support from The George Washington University's School of Public Health and Health Services, will build on what's currently underway in each city:

- Atlanta/Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness: Bridging the Gap will focus on HIV-positive clients referred to and enrolled in the county's HIV Primary Care Clinic by implementing a community-based Linkage Coordinator and referral program.
- Houston Department of Health and Human Services: Expanded Linkage to Care Initiative (ELCI) will implement a multi-sector effort bringing together healthcare providers, community groups, and researchers to launch a community-wide System Navigator and Data Matching Program to identify all those living with HIV who have fallen out of care and re-engage them.
- The City of Philadelphia Department of Public Health: Engaging HIV+ Patients in Care in Philadelphia Initiative will use System Navigators to help guide HIV patients through the

local health care system to improve regular care, viral suppression, and management of HIV-related co-morbidities and other chronic diseases.

“On the eve of the AIDS 2012 conference, we are reminded there is still much left to be done to reduce the suffering and loss of life caused by HIV/AIDS,” said Shannon Hader, MD, MPH, vice president and director, Center for Health Systems and Solutions, Futures Group. “The new HIV Care Collaborative will provide added resources to support the innovation and commitments of local communities to improve timely access to care and strengthen capacity and achieve better outcomes for people living with HIV in Atlanta, Houston and Philadelphia.”

Merck's Commitment to Communities Impacted by HIV

For more than 25 years, Merck has been committed to reducing healthcare disparities and improving access to HIV treatment and care in the United States. As part of this commitment, Merck engages in public-private partnerships to reduce the impact of HIV on those most in need and most at risk. Merck collaborates with leading AIDS service organizations to develop solutions that strengthen access to treatment, care and support for disproportionately impacted communities. For more information about Merck's commitment to reducing health disparities in HIV, visit www.merckresponsibility.com.

About The Merck Company Foundation

The Merck Company Foundation is a U.S.-based, private charitable foundation. Established in 1957 by Merck, a global healthcare leader, the Foundation is funded entirely by the company and is Merck's chief source of funding support to qualified non-profit, charitable organizations. Since its inception, The Merck Company Foundation has contributed more than \$700 million to support important initiatives that address societal needs and are consistent with Merck's overall mission to help the world be well. For more information, visit www.merckgiving.com

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19/07/2012