



Press Release

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Thomas Street Health Center Hosts World AIDS Day Observance *Event promotes HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention*

More than 200 staff and community supporters gathered at the Harris County Hospital District's (HCHD) Thomas Street Health Center on Dec. 1 to commemorate World AIDS Day. The annual event, hosted by HCHD in collaboration with the City of Houston Department of Health and Human Services, brings local attention to the global epidemic and shows the hospital district's and city's commitment to HIV/AIDS patients in the community.

"Thomas Street treats approximately 60 percent of Harris County's HIV/AIDS patients," said Jeff Benavides, HCHD health educator. "This event is one way of showing our commitment to improving our community's health, through education and awareness."

This year's theme, "Have You Heard Me Today?" focused on women and girls, who globally are more than twice as susceptible to the disease than males. In the Houston area, females represent 26 percent of those infected with HIV/AIDS.

Nurse practitioner Yvette Peters said there has been a significant increase in the number of female patients seen at the woman's program at Thomas Street, which provides specialty services to females infected with HIV/AIDS.

"The main issues affecting countless women and girls are lack of knowledge and misconceptions on ways of contracting the disease," Peters said. "Many women don't realize this is as much a heterosexual disease as it a homosexual one, and that it's not only your behavior that matters, but also the risky behavior of your partner."

Keynote speakers U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and City of Houston Council Member Ada Edwards were also on hand to show their support and call the public to action, asking them to get informed about the disease.

Event highlights included the Tree of Remembrance dedication ceremony, where decorations were placed on a 12-ft. holiday tree in memory of loved ones who have died from HIV/AIDS, and a health and education fair. Local agencies that provide support services to persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS were available to provide guests information and on-site health screenings.

HCHD comprises Thomas Street Health Center, one of the nation's first free-standing HIV/AIDS treatment facilities; three major hospitals including Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital and Quentin Mease Community Hospital; 12 community health centers; 13 satellite homeless shelter clinics; six school-based clinics and four mobile health units.

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