In case you hadn’t heard syphilis is on the rise in our region, especially in Onondaga County. In response, we recently hosted a press conference along with representatives from the NYS Health Department, the County of Onondaga’s STD Clinic, and the Infectious disease department of SUNY Upstate Hospital, to highlight for the general public this serious health threat, as well as to introduce our enhanced testing initiative using a newly approved rapid syphilis test, similar to the rapid HIV test.

I had the easy part of MC, relegated to the ceremonial, as our Director of Prevention, Erin Bortel represented ACR Health with an expertise that far outweighs my knowledge on the subject: thank the gods…

It was as much a learning experience for me as for any of the press present. In fact, half my learning came from the perceptive questions and speculations of those covering the event, as they postulated various theories to explain this dramatic escalation of syphilis cases along with the changing geographic demographics of sexually transmitted infections, across the board.

According to the NYS Health Department data, where once such infections were generally concentrated in contained areas (e.g. a neighborhood, a school, a small rural community, etc.), there is now a pattern of infection that suggests people’s sexual partners are often geographically more removed from one another: enter the age of the app…!

The clever and humorous line, “There’s an app for that”, couldn’t be more accurate then when it comes to the various sexual ‘hook-up’ sites people access through their smart phones. For the uninitiated, there are multiple apps/programs you can load on to your smart phone which allows for instant/real-time communication between those looking for a sexual encounter or a ‘hook-up’: foreplay reduced to a text message.

While I’ve heard a lot of talk over the past few years about these apps and the ease of connecting anonymously with a potential sexual partner, along with how we should incorporate this new way of meeting/connecting into our prevention efforts, it was during the press conference I first saw a visual of the data points illustrating the distance between those who were spreading and acquiring (in this case) syphilis. It drove home the point.

With a car and a smartphone you’re set to, ‘get out of Dodge’, for any dodgy encounter you want kept confidential.

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This year’s Bubble Blast Run took place inside The New York State Fair for the first time ever. Fair goers, “carnies”, and restaurant row workers all joined in cheering on the Bubble runners! Once again, smiles were everywhere as the runners conquered the bubbly course!

The Bubble Blast Run supports ACR Health’s Adolescent Health Initiative which helps teens make good decisions about issues that affect their life and health, and the Q Center. The Q Center is a safe space for LGBTQ youth, their allies and parents to find support, prevention education and educational support, including scholarships for college bound youth.

With your help, we continue our work and expand our services. Best of all, we have fun doing it! Again, thank you for your generous support!
Emergency Pantry Gets New Look, Keeps Same Mission

ACR Health has always maintained a food and personal care items pantry for its clients who receive care management services. The number of people we serve has grown significantly with the influx of those with chronic health conditions, and, for those who need emergency food assistance, our food pantry has kept pace. With the assistance of the Food Bank of Central New York, ACR Health now offers refrigerated and frozen food items. Right now, we are in special need of certain personal care items, if you’d like to help.

Every time someone comes into one of our offices or up to one of our neighborhood-based vans for HIV/STD/HEPc testing, a connection is made and an opportunity opens up for us to discuss face to face health and safe sexual activity along with the many other health-related services we have to offer. As I see it, the more isolated and alienated a person is, or feels, the less inclined they are to care about their own health or the risk they pose to another’s health. A real-time encounter, in the physical presence of a skilled, well informed, non-judgmental helping professional in a safe and friendly environment, with an invitation to stay connected can be the beginning of a whole new way of changing risky behavior and interrupting an epidemic.

As far as I know, there’s not an app for that…

If you’re worried about locals knowing your business, you can find someone 30/60 minutes away with little worry of running into them in the near. Of course, you don’t need a car at all if the other party wants to travel to you: an epidemic of detached sexual activity...? A reflection for another time.

We’re in the business of promoting health and safety in every arena including the sexual. So, as announced, we now offer a simple and quick finger prick test for syphilis (in the past a blood draw was required). We expect to see a lot of community members taking advantage of this new service.

All items can be dropped off at:
627 West Genesee Street, Syracuse.

- Toothpaste
- Mouthwash (alcohol free)
- Paper towels
- Deodorant
- Shaving Gel/Cream
- Razors
- Tampons
- Maxipads
- All purpose cleaner (Comet)
- Laundry detergent (liquid or powder)
ACR Health is now approved to administer syphilis screenings following a significant increase in the number of cases in New York State. Infectious syphilis cases increased 44 percent in Upstate New York between 2013 and 2014. In Central New York the number of cases increased 111% during this period. Cases are mainly seen among males, especially gay men and men who have sex with men. The New York State Department of Health called the data for newly identified syphilis cases “ alarming.”

Everyone should be aware of the risk factors, signs, and symptoms of syphilis. Having unprotected sex, multiple sex partners, or a new sex partner can all increase the risk of syphilis infection, as well as other STDs and HIV.

Syphilis symptoms include a large painless sore at the infection site (usually genitals, and can also be around the rectum, mouth, or other areas) and a rash, usually on the hands and feet. These symptoms will go away on their own but the infection is still in the body.

Syphilis increases the risk of getting HIV if exposed. Syphilis is easy to transmit, and many people don’t have symptoms. Using condoms does reduce the risk of infection. Strategies to prevent HIV (PrEP and serosorting) do not protect against syphilis and other STDs.

ACR Health provides free and confidential testing services for syphilis, hepatitis C, HIV, gonorrhea, and chlamydia at four of our offices and at other designated locations in the community every month. Drop in testing is available in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and Canton during business hours (8:30-4:30) on weekdays. Appointments preferred. Call 800.475.2430 or email at testing@ACRHealth.org.
A hot competition has sprung up between teams jockeying for position to come out on top of the heap when fundraising awards are handed out at the First Frost AIDS Walk/Run on October 18th.

Two of the teams, including the Redneck Rebels, are home grown, employees of ACR Health who decided a little friendly competition would be good for office morale.

Team Quickies* have held a series of successful events. “Fundraising is something that I just get very intense about,” said Brandy Snyder (top row left) who got her whole community involved in a volleyball tournament that raised $982.

Community Teams to keep an eye out for are HIfiVe, led by Dr. Marylene Duah, and Friends of Carmen, led by long time supporter Carmen Sweet. Both regularly win awards for highest or second highest fundraising totals.

*The name Team Quickies is based on an ACR Health Prevention Department t shirt slogan advertising HIV tests: The front of the t shirt reads: “I love a Quickie” and on the back: “20 minutes that could change your life. Rapid HIV and Hepatitis C Testing @ACR Health. Find out your status by emailing testing@ACRHealth.org and scheduling an appointment.
ACR Health’s Safety First Syringe Exchange is a health and safety strategy that provides new sterile syringes and other supplies to protect injection drug users from HIV and viral hepatitis; provides safe disposal of used syringes; and offers risk reduction counseling and referrals to substance use programs. Syringe exchange programs in New York are responsible for as much as a 75% decline in rates of new HIV cases.

• Every day, 44 people in the U.S. die from overdose of prescription painkillers, and many more become addicted (CDC).

• More than 36,000 people die of unintentional drug overdoses every year, and many from abusing and misusing prescription pills.

• As many as 2.5 million people are treated at hospitals every year for drug related poisoning.

• Every day 2,000 teens are using prescriptions like OxyContin and Vicodin as a new social drug to get high for the first time.

Many lives have been destroyed by substance abuse and the disease of addiction. Too often this disease is perceived as deserved and shameful, leaving families and friends to grieve in silence.

To bring attention to the destructive forces of drug abuse, ACR Health, in conjunction with NOPE (Narcotic Overdose Prevention and Education) Task Force will hold simultaneous candle light vigils in Syracuse, Watertown, and Utica on October 29.

SYRACUSE
Date: October 29, 2015
Time: 6:00
Place: Hanover Square

WATERTOWN
Date: October 29, 2015
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Place: First Baptist Church, Public Square

UTICA
Date: October 29, 2015
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Place: Hannah Park, Utica City Hall

The candlelight vigils strive to raise awareness and open the doors to recovery by eliminating prejudice toward injection drug users. With the removal of shame comes the hope for change. The memory of our children, our relatives, and our friends who have passed will live on in our hearts, be honored and remembered.

Many overdose fatalities are preventable, especially if witnesses have had appropriate training to administer Narcan, which reverses opioid overdose. ACR Health has trained more than 700 individuals how to administer Narcan. If you would like to sign up for their life-saving training, email Narcan@ACRHealth.org.
Volunteers keep ACR Health an integral part of the community. They help with major fundraisers, send out our community mailings, and keep our office operational. We could not do our work without them! Andrew Lynch, new to the Volunteer Department, was asked to list the names of volunteers who have helped us from July 2014 – June 2015, and was amazed as the final count crossed 550 volunteers. “Never have I been a part of an organization with such incredible community support. The commitment of the volunteers inspires me daily to work harder as an employee.” (You can view the list in the upcoming Annual report.)

Mary Doody, Director of Volunteer Services, attributes the high number to the many opportunities present at ACR. “We seek to match our volunteers with tasks that play to their strengths. When our volunteers feel accomplished while helping ACR’s mission, we have done our job.”

Volunteers Play Vital Role at ACR Health

ACR Health .. taking over the State Fair .. PRICELESS!

ACR Health Prevention Services wowed the crowd as part of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s Women’s Day Mini Health Fair at the Great New York State Fair, connecting with a huge crowd gathered at Chevy Court where Salt-N-Pepa performed.

Prevention Health Advocates distributed dozens of #endAIDS sponges - which really came in handy in the hot sun, folks used them as fans, and they wet them to wipe their sweat. The mood was fun, but the message very serious. Stay sexually smart and stay free of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Whether volunteering for one day at a major event like the First Frost AIDS Walk/Run (you can sign up online at ACRHealth.org/volunteers) or for specific jobs on a regular basis, such as the No Hitch Luncheon, volunteers keep this organization running smoothly. We are always looking for more amazing volunteers to be a part of our team – contact us today! Volunteer@ACRHealth.org

September 22, 2015, Destiny USA ~ ACR Health volunteer Nancy Walker and Jesuit Volunteer Andrew Lynch recruiting individuals at a CNY Volunteer Fair sponsored by Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli. Some who signed up were teachers interested in getting students to volunteer as a class.

Kudos to a great team (Elizabeth, Daniel, Nicole, and Lanika) that took advantage of the opportunity to spread the #endAIDS message far and wide.

Relentless in their quest to #endAIDS, ACR Health Prevention staff recruited VIP State fair visitor, NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli to spread the word.
ACR Health offers its services to anyone without discrimination based on age, race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, political affiliation, marital status, handicapped status, or mode of transmission.

ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Follow us on:

Facebook Twitter Pinterest

United Way

October 18, 2015 - Sunday
16th Annual First Frost AIDS Walk/Run 5K
1:00 p.m. Thompson Park Zoo, and Conservatory, Watertown. Sign up as an individual or a team. AIDSwalkCNY.com. Together we can #endAIDS.

December 1, 2015 - Tuesday
World AIDS Day
Remembrance service at 7:30 a.m. at LeMoyne College’s Panasci Chapel.

December 2015
Holiday Angels
Join us as we brighten the holiday season for those affected by chronic diseases (including HIV/AIDS) by providing needed items as gifts for ACR Health clients. Call 800.475.2430 for more information.

Marketing Opportunities Available
ACR Health has numerous fundraising and educational events in nine New York counties: Cayuga, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and St. Lawrence. Sponsorship of ACR Health’s special events offers a marketing opportunity guaranteed to introduce thousands of area residents to your business all while publicizing your support of a good cause. Call Carrie Portzline-Large at 800.475.2430 or email events@ACRHealth.org to learn more.

Build a Strong Neighborhood
Want to host a giving party at your house and donate the proceeds to ACR Health? We can help you! Contact us today at 800.475.2430 or events@ACRHealth.org.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION FORUMS
Forums provide HIV education to community members and those interested in becoming volunteers. Events are held monthly in Syracuse and Utica. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up.

LGBTQ YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS
ACR Health has numerous programs for LGBTQ youth, including support group meetings in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and the Mohawk Valley. Participants are grouped by ages from 8-26.

The Q Center for a full listing
Syracuse youth group meetings are at the Q Center, 617 West Genesee Street
Information: 315.701.2431 or qcenter@ACRHealth.org

Mohawk Valley: LGBTQ Youth Group in Little Falls
Information: 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Utica: The Q2 LBGTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.793.0661 ext. 133 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Watertown: Qubed LGBTQ Youth Group
Information: 315.785.8222 ext. 377

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