

Southern Nevada Health District  
Las Vegas, Nevada

# Hepatitis C Investigation, 2008

Mary Ellen Harrell, MS, RN, CCM  
CHN Manager  
Office of HIV/AIDS/STD



# Overview & Investigation Timeline

- January 2, 2008, SNHD identified a cluster of 3 cases of acute hepatitis C all having procedures at the Endoscopy Center of Southern Nevada
- Nevada State Health Division State Epidemiologist notified
- CDC called by SNHD for TA
- State Bureau of Licensure and Certification (BLC) notified
- January 4, 2008 formal request for epidemiologic assistance to the CDC
- January 9, 2008 CDC staff arrives in Las Vegas



- January 9, 2008, SNHD, CDC, BLC met with clinic management
- January 10, 2008, reviewing records and charts of known acute cases
- January 11, 2008, observation of clinic operations & procedures
- Unsafe injection practices identified
  - Reuse of single use Propofol vials for multiple patients
  - Reuse of syringes
  - Reuse of single use equipment
- Determined these unsafe practices were the standard since March, 2004.
  - 39,562 patient names received
  - Incomplete list & documentation
  - Similar conditions found at another location
  - 60,000 letters generated



# Findings as of September, 2008:

- Total of 8 acute cases of hepatitis C from 2 facility locations
- July 25, 2007 & September 21, 2007 – dates that disease transmission known to occur
- Additional chronic case linked directly to source case of September 21, 2007
- Post announcement of hepatitis C outbreak, identified 2 acute cases from June 2005 and June 2006 directly related to same facility. Original diagnosing physicians failed to report



# Enhancing Health Department Capacity to Respond

- Incident Command System (ICS)
  - Planning, operations, finance, logistics, information liaison
- Need for outside phone support
  - Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center providing 24 hour availability and a consistent safety net
- Telephone interviews
  - Logistical nightmare
- Medical Reserve Corp (MRC) & Students
  - Just in time training
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control & Epidemiology, Inc.
  - Local chapter to assist in health provider education
- Technical Bulletins



- Update health department staff daily
- Utilize the media wisely
  - Take and keep control
  - Avoid jargon & explain acronyms
  - Instill trust & show compassion
  - Show the face & expertise of public health



# Supporting Potential Patients

- Community Forum
  - Resources available
    - Testing, Counseling, Peer support, medical speakers, legal issues
- Hepatitis C Exposure Registry
  - Assist with identification of patients from both clinics
  - Nursing Case Management
- Nursing Case Management Goals
  - Assist patients to navigate through the treatment process
  - Create linkages with treatment resources
  - Provide preventive treatment to prevent further liver damage
  - Education & support



# Additional Challenges:

- Legal System
  - Clients won't/can't speak
  - Interviewing with attorney
  - Misinformation
  - Medical Records
- State Public Health System
  - SNHD did not have authority to close medical practice
  - Coordination with multiple County/City/State Agencies



# Additional Challenges (cont.)

- Media
  - Local & National
    - TV, newspapers, radio, multilingual
  - The Face of Public Health
- Public Perception, Mistrust
  - For all healthcare providers
  - Prevention messages
- Needs of SNHD Staff
  - Number who were potentially exposed
  - Provider cited was HMO & PPO facility



# Lessons Learned:

- Planning is crucial
- Never lose sight of the personal side of this tragedy
  - Initial call center (anger & angst)
  - Practical solutions
- Collaboration necessary with multidisciplinary & professional organizations for cohesive response
- Need for enhanced provider education with a link to licensing & accreditation
- Legislative Policy Recommendations
  - Free standing centers
  - Maintain effective surveillance (only 36 states currently require reporting of chronic & acute hepatitis C)
- Establish the Face of Public Health