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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SESQUICENTENNIALBoston University
School of Medicine

Office of Media Relations
Betty Russell, Director
720 Harrison Avenue
Suite 909
Boston, MA 02118-2393
617 638-8491

NEWS

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Contact: Betty Russell
or Gina DiGravio
(617) 638-8491

MEDIA ADVISORY
MEDICAL STUDENTS TEACH TEENAGERS ABOUT AIDS

Boston, Mass.--Medical students from Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) are now conducting unique interactive discussions at neighborhood community centers to teach teenagers about AIDS. The program--Students Teaching AIDS to Students (STATS)--educates young adolescents about AIDS, who is at risk, how it is transmitted, what treatments are available and, most importantly, how it can be prevented. Two STATS sessions will be held on Wednesday, November 8: the first begins at 4:15 p.m. at the Roslindale Community School, 6 Cummins Highway in Roslindale; the second begins at 7 p.m. at the South Boston Boys and Girls Club, 230 West 6th Street in South Boston.

One of the main goals of the program is to clear up some of the myths surrounding AIDS. "We found that most of the teenagers know all the slogans about AIDS, but they don't really understand what they mean," says Andy Chiou, a BUSM student and co-director of the project. "One of the most common misconceptions concerns the use of birth control. Many teenagers think if condoms prevent the spread of the virus then other forms of birth control, such as the diaphragm or oral contraceptives, will be equally as effective."

During a typical STATS session, two trained medical students--usually a male and a female--present information about AIDS through discussion, games, a question and answer period and a video program. The teenagers are encouraged to submit anonymous questions and are given an information sheet listing AIDS hotlines, support groups and other services. The medical students vary the program depending on the audience, using vocabulary and cultural examples appropriate to their audience.

By presenting their discussions in community centers where attendance is

voluntary, the students hope to reach teenagers who are motivated to learn about and prevent the spread of AIDS. The medical students base their approach on the philosophy that they are students themselves. "We're not that much older than some of the teenagers we're talking to," says Dennis Crawford, a BUSM student and co-director of the program. "It's easy for us to relate to some of their concerns."

The medical students undergo hours of preparation before they are considered "trained" to lead the discussions. Experts from BUSM and Boston City Hospital teach them about the scientific and clinical aspects of HIV and AIDS--subjects generally not covered during the first two years of medical school. And, experienced educators talk with the medical students about how to approach teenagers about these sensitive issues. Prior to their first STATS session, students rehearse their discussions and are evaluated by other presenters.

First- and second-year medical students at BUSM developed the STATS program in conjunction with the American Medical Student Association. They began formulating their program and conducted two sessions in the spring, before gearing up for a more comprehensive and organized effort this fall.

Chiou and Crawford say the program benefits both the community and the medical students involved. "The program allows medical students to get involved with AIDS and get over their fears instead of avoiding the disease," says Chiou. "I don't want to see or treat a lot of people dying from this terrible disease when I start practicing medicine," says Crawford. "This is a preventable disease. We want to do something now to curtail the spread of the virus."

The STATS programs have been presented in Roxbury, Newton, South Boston and Charlestown. Chiou and Crawford say their future plans involve increasing the number of medical students who are interested in teaching teens about AIDS, reaching more neighborhoods and possibly developing a curriculum in Spanish.