

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

## VOLUNTARY HIV TESTING AT HINDS COUNTY JAIL PART OF UMMC'S PREVENTION STRATEGY

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JACKSON, Miss. – Dr. Leandro Mena, an associate professor of infectious diseases at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, has received a \$202,000 grant from Gilead Sciences, a California-based biopharmaceutical company, to operate a voluntary HIV testing program at the Hinds County Detention Center in Raymond.

The news comes during observation of National HIV Testing Awareness Week.

"This is an important part of our broader HIV prevention strategy to diagnose and treat HIV in the metro Jackson area," Mena said. "With this program, we will be able to include members of the incarcerated population."

The 12-month grant will cover the cost of equipment, materials and a nurse hired by Quality Choice Correctional Healthcare to provide rapid testing to new inmates at the jail in Raymond. The program began testing last week.

QCCH since 2012 has held a contract with Hinds County to provide comprehensive medical services for the Hinds County Detention Center, the adjacent Penal Farm, and the downtown Jackson jail.

"About 25 percent of our UMMC HIV clinic's population has a history of incarceration," Mena said. "We're serving a city with the nation's fourth-highest per capita HIV infection rate, so this should prove to be a successful strategy."

The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control reports Miami led the nation in 2011, the most recent year calculated. New Orleans was second, and Baton Rouge was third.

For the year ending Dec. 31, 2012, the most recent information available, the Mississippi Department of Health reported 547 new HIV infections. The state ranked seventh nationally in HIV case rates, with a rate of 20.7 per 100,000 people.

African-Americans accounted for 75 percent of new infections in Mississippi in 2012, and the highest rates of infections were among African-American and Hispanic populations. Jackson has the second-highest rate nationally of HIV infection among men ages 15-24, Mena said.

Inmates at the Raymond jail who test positive will be linked to HIV care through a coordinated effort led by Mena's team, as well as given other helpful educational materials. While they're incarcerated, they'll receive treatment provided by the nurse contracted by Quality Choice, with Mena's oversight.

When inmates are released, prompt follow-up will be coordinated by Mena's team. "The Hinds County jail staff has worked closely with UMMC to make this program a reality," Mena said.

"In keeping with our mission to redirect correctional health care through a holistic approach to the health-care needs of the clients we serve, QCCH intends to become an integral partner in the community's quest for growth and development," said Floyd Brown, QCCH health services administrator.

"We look forward to working with the staff at UMMC as they continue to address the issues of health in the community, as we strongly believe that the strength of a community is embedded in its health."

Gilead Sciences discovers, develops and commercializes innovative therapeutics in areas of unmet medical need. The company's mission is to advance the care of patients suffering from life-threatening diseases worldwide.

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at (601) 984-1100 or click [here](#).