

Samaritan Ministry

Newsletter
May 2020

-a ministry of Central Baptist Church of Bearden-

Our Mission is Unchanged during the Pandemic

Our church should be a beacon of light and hope, by way of Christ, to anyone who suffers from or has family who suffers from this disease.

We are committed to maintaining contact and reaching out to each one of our HIV clients, and to providing the opportunity for HIV testing in a safe and timely manner.



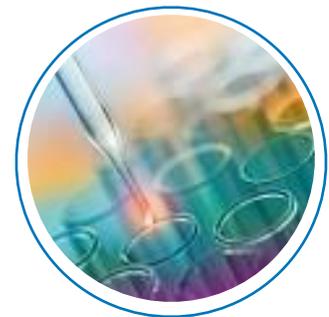
Samaritan Offices Have Moved

We now have an office on the second floor of the church and we will be having all of our meetings at The CORE, which is a building on the west side of the church connected to the main building by a covered walkway. If you need to come to my office, please call so I can make safe arrangements to see you.



Samaritan Summer Cookout

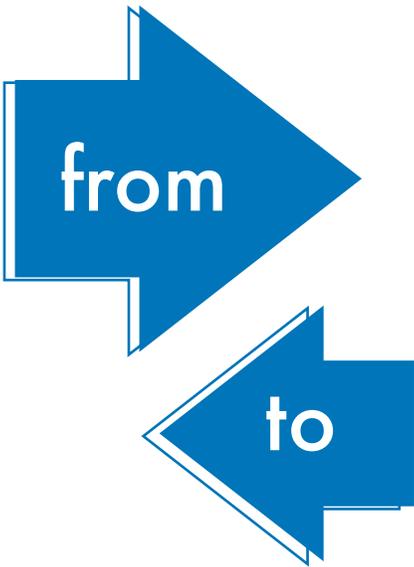
We have made the tough decision to cancel our June cookout. With so much uncertainty, we are not setting a date at a later time. Our cookout has been an annual event since 1999, so this is a hard one, but we value your safety and the safety of our volunteers, too.



Our Treatment and Care Update

As part of our regular Newsletter content we are going to summarize recent news regarding HIV treatment and care.

You can find our summary on page 2.



USCHA Scheduled in Puerto Rico October 10 -13

NMAC, the sponsoring organization for the United States Conference on HIV/AIDS, scheduled its fall conference in Puerto Rico. This was done to promote care and access for our hispanic brothers and sisters, and to stand with Puerto Rico in times of economic problems following natural disasters. What a great idea!

Now, we are into this pandemic and looking at this trip with a very cautious eye. NMAC has not made a decision about this conference yet, but we are expecting either a virtual version of the conference, or a postponement to a later time. We will keep you updated.

Our Treatment and Care Update

Despite Comprehensive HIV Prevention Initiatives, HIV infection rates remain stable (around 39,000/yr.). Gay and bi-sexual men continue to be the group most affected and HIV still disproportionately affects minority communities.

HIV antiviral therapy still works, providing THREE great outcomes for people living with HIV.

1) With some great news from CROI (Conference on Retrovirals and Opportunistic Infections - "the big science conference") researchers found that for people who initiated HIV medications with CD4 counts above 500, there was no remaining gap in life expectancy compared

with people without HIV.

- 2) Consistent HIV therapy will provide long term health benefits including control of HIV.
- 3) HIV therapy, resulting in suppressed (undetectable) viral load, will make sexual transmission to another person impossible.

Rapid Start of ARV Therapy is making a difference in transmission. During the initial infection phase (acute infection), viral levels are very high, and this can increase the potential for transmission. DHHS has recently updated their treatment guidelines to recommend the start of HIV therapy "as soon as possible" after infection.



Vaccine development for HIV has seen a long history of fits and starts. Notably, a recent vaccine study (HVTN 702) was terminated because the vaccine provided no protection verses the control group. Today, several studies are still underway, hoping to develop this illusive vaccine for HIV. Read more about HIV vaccine trials at HVTN.org.

PrEP or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, has been proven to be an effective way to prevent HIV infection. Two drugs have been approved

Treatment and Care - Continued

for PrEP. Truvada was approved in 2012. A new study found that the concentration of Truvada in the body is about 30% lower during pregnancy compared with the postpartum period. This may not reduce PrEP's effectiveness, but it does suggest that pregnant women on PrEP need to be particularly strict about taking their daily doses of Truvada. (from [POZ.com](#)) Descovy, the other approved PrEP drug, is also effective, but was not studied for vaginal sex, and is therefore NOT recommended for women.

Long-Acting Injectables, an alternative to oral medications, have been

under study, and have been approved in Canada. Cabenuva, a combo of two HIV medications (cabotegravir + rilpivirine) which is dosed every four weeks, has shown to be an effective alternative for HIV therapy. In December the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declined to approve this combo based on concerns about its manufacturing process. ViiV has stated that it is working with the FDA to address those concerns. (from [POZ.com](#))

Long acting injectables are also in development for PrEP.

New Strategies -

Two **AMP (Antibody Mediated Protection)**

studies investigate using HIV antibodies as protection against an HIV infection. If successful, these antibodies would be injected every 8 weeks. AMP data is due in the fall of 2020.

Several studies are looking at HIV prevention (PrEP) products for **pregnant women** including the use of traditional PrEP oral medication, and a vaginal ring containing the HIV antiviral medication dapivirine.



A group of women at Central Bearden have been making cloth masks for our community. We have mailed about 65 masks to those we serve. Using masks is good for public health. Making and sending them is L-O-V-E.



HIV Testing has been shut down for the most part due to COVID-19, but we know that there is still a need. In the United States, there are 160,000 people who have HIV and are unaware of their status. A few agencies, like Positively Living and Helen Ross McNabb Center, have started doing limited HIV

testing in their offices, and even in some client-centered facilities.

There is, however, another option. We are making a home-based HIV testing available using a rapid test that is especially made for testing at home. If you, or someone you know, needs an HIV test, please have them contact us at info@samaritancentral.org so we can make home-based HIV testing available. There is no cost for this testing.



A Report on the Opioid Crisis and the Syndemics of HIV, Hepatitis C and Overdose

HIV Outbreak in Concert with Opioid Misuse -

We have seen several HIV outbreaks around the country that are rooted in the misuse of drugs through injection. These outbreaks provide a link between injection drug use and HIV infection and an dramatic increase in Hepatitis C (HCV).

Hepatitis C Epidemic Still on the Rise - Since 2010, the number of new HCV infections in this country has increased by 350%. While we have curative treatment for HCV, there is still no vaccine, and access to treatment and cure is way below where it needs to be.

Overdose, Harm Reduction, Medication, and and Safe Disposal

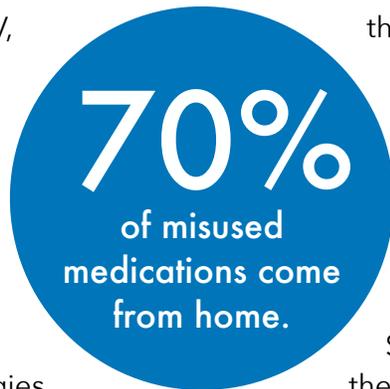
“Harm reduction” is a term that is used to describe a group of strategies that lower risk and harm for those misusing drugs when an abstinence approach may not work. Abstinence programs (i.e. 12-Step/ Celebrate Recovery) are very successful for many

people, but are not for everyone. A multi-faceted approach includes these programs plus...

- **Syringe Exchange** (now legal in Tennessee) is an important public health strategy that reduces the spread of diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C. We also know that syringe programs bring vulnerable people close to those who care and to recovery programs.

- **Medicated Assisted Therapy or MAT**, is the use of medication for substance abuse treatment. While often disparaged by many, this harm reduction strategy has become the gold standard in the fight against addiction and its devastating effects.

- **Safe disposal of prescription drugs** from home is an issue that Samaritan Ministry will be promoting in the coming months. It is sometimes said that Grandma is often the biggest drug provider of all. Look for our **Remove the Risk** campaign - coming soon!





COVID - 19 and HIV

How has COVID-19 affected Samaritan Ministry?

We started off with a normal week at the beginning of March. We had our Support Group meeting and held events as part of National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS. After that, things shut down. We have been trying to stay in touch with all of our clients and have provided some grocery assistance with Kroger cards to the 30+ families to whom we normally deliver at the end of the month. We have continued to try to maintain some of our important services, such as:

- communication by phone and the internet
- rent and utility assistance
- nutritional support with grocery store gift cards.

The MAC AIDS Fund, one of our perennial financial supporters, has bumped up a grant cycle to impact COVID-19, and we are hopeful for a little additional funding to specifically assist our clients during this outbreak. This is important as we have lost other funding support from Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. (See page 6).

How Does COVID-19 Impact People Living with HIV?

How COVID-19 affects people living with HIV is not fully understood. At present there is no evidence to suggest that there is an increased risk of infection and increased severity of illness for people living with HIV (with the understanding that they are not immunosuppressed and/or have no other co-infections or co-morbidities). However,

people living with HIV who are not in treatment or who are not virally suppressed may have a compromised immune system (measured by a low CD4 count). This would make them vulnerable to opportunistic infections and more severe illnesses.

It is thought that people living with HIV who have achieved viral suppression through antiretroviral treatment and do not have a low CD4 count will be affected by COVID-19 in a similar way to what a person not living with HIV would be.

And the BIG Question: Are people with HIV at higher risk for COVID-19 than other people?

We know that older adults and people of any age who have a serious underlying medical condition might be at higher risk for severe illness, including people who are immunocompromised.

The risk for people with HIV getting very sick is greatest in:

- People with a low CD4 cell count
- People not on HIV treatment (antiretroviral therapy or ART)

People with HIV can also be at increased risk of getting very sick with COVID-19 based on their age and other medical conditions.

The International AIDS Society (IAS) has put together a comprehensive page with multiple resources for getting COVID-19 information if you are a person living with HIV. <https://www.iasociety.org/covid-19-hiv>

Samaritan Ministry impacted financially by COVID - 19 crisis



Many non-profits have been impacted by COVID-19 due to the loss of jobs and closing of businesses. For us, one not-so-obvious issue is the closure of shows on Broadway in New York. One of our largest and most faithful grantors is an organization known as Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS (BC/EFA). This group

raises funds at Broadway Shows and distributes funds to many local HIV organizations across the country (including Samaritan Ministry). We have received \$7500 each year for the care of our client- base with emergency funds for rent and utilities. We have been notified that we will not receive these funds for 2020.

**Please consider a gift to Samaritan Ministry to help to support our programs.
2020 is likely to be a challenging year for us!**



You can mail a check to us via snail mail. Make your check payable to **Central Bearden/Samaritan** and send it to 6300 Deane Hill Dr. Knoxville, TN 37919.

Online giving is easy. Use the Central Bearden website, [Central Bearden](#), and choose Samaritan in the pull-down menu.



Please help us to provide for the following services... and more.

Advocacy | Case Management & Counseling | Jail & Prison Ministry | Transportation | Food Ministry | HIV Prevention Education & Testing | Hepatitis C Prevention Education & Testing | Nursing Seminars | HIV and Hepatitis C Awareness Seminars | HIV and Hepatitis C Materials Development & Distribution | Support Groups | Social & Family Support | Syringe Exchange Support | Rent & Utility Rescue | Prescription Drug Assistance