



Editorial Comment

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Editor

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Even as kids reach adolescence, they need more than ever for us to watch over them. Adolescence is not about letting go. It's about hanging on during a very bumpy ride.

—Dr. Ron Taffel, Child and Family Therapist

Many people in El Paso suffer from diseases or conditions partially caused by "social behaviors" that first began during the teenage years. Examples of these include Type 2 diabetes from excess weight, lung cancer or oral cancer from early tobacco use, gingivitis and tooth decay from poor oral hygiene, and multiple pregnancies/STDs from high risk sexual behaviors.

Here are some of the depressing statistics:

- In Texas currently, 3/10 girls are pregnant by the age of 18 and we have the highest rates or repeat births to teens in the United States. In El Paso, the highest rates are in East El Paso (zips 79928, 79916) with 13-20% of teen girls giving birth in 2007 in these areas (Paso Del Norte Health Foundation data).
- Overall, the rate of tobacco chewers in middle school and high school levels in Texas ranged from 6% to 9.6% in a study done in 2006 (vs. 3-7% in the U.S. as a whole). Cigarette use in Texas in 2009 by middle and high school students was 21.2% compared to 17.8% in Connecticut teens (CDC State Tobacco Activities and Evaluation System 2010).
- Of Hispanics surveyed in a national study, only 59.8% of those living in Texas vs. 72.5% living in NY State had visited a dentist in the previous year (CDC, 2008 data). Texas is one of 18/50 states with no identified state oral health care plan and there are only 3 dental schools in Texas. In Horizon in 2007-2008, a pilot study reported the rate of untreated dental caries in children aged 6 months-5 years to be 20% (Days, Hernandez and Dickinson, 2008).

Now here is some of the good news,

- Community Scholars is a youth leadership development internship program that provides public policy research opportunities for high school sophomores, juniors, and college students. The summer program began in 1998. The 27-30 high school interns spend time researching issues in public policy, including areas of health care, education, city infrastructure and quality of life and present their findings to local and state

agencies (communityscholars.org). Many of the recent topics have included research into halting teen pregnancies and STIs.

- The Rawlings Pediatric Dental Clinic, a City of El Paso Department of Public Health program, will soon expand services to the Lower Valley through a satellite clinic at its Ysleta office and there are now 3 new public health dentists working with the Rawlings Clinic (see article in this issue).
- The UMC Teen Advisory Board and The Dept of Health STD clinic work to provide education and programs for pregnancy and STI prevention.
- Several public health campaigns in town are targeted toward reducing tobacco, and other substance abuse, in teenagers.

I have faith that these and other initiatives provided in El Paso will help reduce some of the burden of "social" diseases in our teenagers. If you work with this population, do not neglect these issues. This will be especially important as we begin another school year.

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The Department of Internal Medicine at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Paul L. Foster School of Medicine is currently conducting pharmaceutical company trials in the following areas: Diarrhea Predominant Irritable Bowel Syndrome (Nancy Casner and Yvette Gomez), Gastroparesis / diabetic and non-diabetic (Natalia Vega and Denise Vasquez), and West Nile Virus (Sean Connery). For more information about or to refer patients for any of the studies please call 545-6626 ext 280 or email sean.connery@ttuhsc.edu