



Spring Cleaning



It's that time of year again - spring has sprung! Winter's cold and snow have left us, and warmer sunnier days are here. And yes, that means it's spring cleaning time. Most folks think about their closets, but spring cleaning is about getting rid of any stuff that doesn't fit in your life.



Doug Wirth, CEO

While there are lots of challenges to living with HIV/AIDS, hopefully you're the most important person to you. So, its very important to make good decisions about what you eat and drink; regularly seeing your provider and case manager; reducing use of alcohol/drugs; maintaining your benefits; getting help with depression, sadness, or mood swings; keeping your apartment and staying out of jail.

Well, that sounds like a lot of work. And yes, sometimes this means giving up things. Instead of creating big holes in your life, ask yourself what can I put in its place?

At VidaCare, we have special member events every month (see upcoming events below) to support you in practicing good healthy living and having fun. Members who get regular care and know their test results can earn \$50 in gift cards every year (see pg 5). In April, we're reminded to take good care of our feet and May reminds us to pay attention to signs of hepatitis (see pg 4).

Remember, you're not alone. Join us at a VidaCare Town Hall Meeting this spring (see pg 6). VidaCare, our providers and your peers are with you!

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1-800-556-0689

Upcoming VidaCare Live Your Life Events

For Members and Guest Only

March 19th (3-5pm) - Meditation

Greater self-awareness and self-expression can help you in life, love, health, school and work!
NY Core Center — 115 E 23rd St/12th Floor, NY
 (Take 6 Train to 23rd Street)

April 23rd (3-6pm) - Ch'i Kung

A powerful yet gentle exercise program that helps stimulate and balance the flow of energy in your body.
 Come join us for an energizing and fun afternoon!
120 Wall Street 14th Fl, NY 10005
 (Corner of Wall & South Street)

May 21st - Art For Living

It is in you! Come discover your creative spirit and live an Inspired life!
 Location to be determined.

June 18th - Chinese Medicine

Come and learn some simple techniques based on ancient medicine. It's all good!
 Location to be determined.

MetroCard, Meal, Gift Bag and Raffle items at every event!

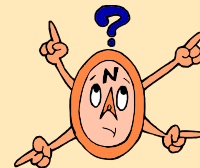


REDUCE USE - HIV, Drugs & Alcohol

There are lots of reasons that people use drugs and alcohol. Also, many social and family gatherings include “partying.”

But let’s be real — *drugs/alcohol change the way your brain works, which affects your decision making about life, relationships, health care and practicing safer sex.* Take a few moments to answer these questions:

- Have you ever substituted one drug for another, thinking that one particular drug was the problem?
- Have you ever stolen drugs or stolen to obtain drugs?
- Have you ever taken one drug to overcome the effects of another?
- Do you avoid people or places that do not approve of you using drugs?
- Has your job or school performance ever suffered from the effects of your drug use?
- Have you ever been arrested as a result of using drugs?
- Have you ever lied about what or how much you use?
- Do you put the purchase of drugs ahead of your financial responsibilities?
- Have you ever been in a jail, hospital, or drug rehabilitation center because of your using?
- Does using interfere with your sleeping or eating?
- Does the thought of running out of drugs terrify you?
- Do you feel it is impossible for you to live without drugs?
- Have you ever thought you couldn’t fit in or have a good time without drugs?
- Do you think a lot about drugs?
- Has using affected your sexual relationships?
- Have you ever used drugs because of emotional pain or stress?
- Have you ever overdosed on any drugs?
- Do you continue to use despite bad experiences?
- Do you think that your drug use is affecting your judgment, preventing you from taking your HIV medication(s)?
- Do you think you might have a drug problem?



If you answered “YES” to any of the above questions, help is just a phone call away! Contact your Case Manager, Primary Care Provider, or you can call **VidaCare @ 1-800-556-0689 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

BYOC — Bring Your Own Condom

We know that condoms can help prevent HIV and other STDs, as well as unwanted pregnancy. So why doesn't everybody always use them? **Does this sound Familiar?**

"He doesn't look sick."

"He didn't ask me to wear one."

"I was too high to ask."

"He said he'd pull out."

"As long as I'm the 'top,' I'm safe."

"People don't really get sick anymore."

"I'm the only guy he does this with."

"It'll ruin the mood. I want to feel you."

"You won't get pregnant—you're on the pill."

"I can't stay hard if I'm wearing one."

"I'll pull out before I come."

"I'm clean, I promise."

"You're the only one I'm with."

"Sleep with another man? Never! I'm not gay!"



No Glove? Oh Baby, then NO LOVE

There are lots of excuses. But learn to talk to your partner/s about safer sex. That isn't always easy, especially the first time. But s/he needs to understand that sex just isn't happening unless it's safe. S/he'll get used to the way a condom feels, and the sex will be better if you don't have to worry about getting HIV or getting pregnant.

And while new medications are helping people feel better and live longer with HIV, the drugs are expensive, have side effects, and don't work for everyone. So, using a condom to prevent HIV is still as important as ever.

Sex can be a healthy and important part of life - so **LIVE YOUR LIFE** - but come prepared! Make sure you have condoms in your pockets, in your car, and in different places in your house, so they're always in reach. Know how to use a condom, and get comfortable with it, so putting it on won't seem like an interruption.



Happy Feet!

April is
National Foot Health Awareness Month

The American Podiatric Medical Association wants everyone to **THINK FEET!** Foot Health Awareness Month calls attention to the importance of good foot and ankle care, and is a time for VidaCare Members to stop, and take a good look at their feet.

According to a new survey, almost 50% of Americans say foot pain has stopped them from doing something routine, such as shopping for groceries or going to the gym. This year's campaign addresses the most common ailments that men and women suffer from, as well as forms of treatment from podiatrists, particularly prescription orthotics.

Remember, **VidaCare** covers podiatry (foot doctor)! Get a referral from your PCP, find a provider in the Directory, or call Member Services at **1-800-556-0689** to find a podiatrist near you.

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month

Healthy Livers?

Did you know that **HEPATITIS IS INFLAMMATION OF THE LIVER?**

There are actually several types of hepatitis, and the disease has several causes.

In the United States today, most infectious cases of hepatitis are caused by one of the hepatitis viruses (A, B, C, D or E). An infection with one of these viruses might not cause any symptoms or might cause only a mild flu-like illness. However, it also can lead to liver failure, coma and death. Hepatitis A is usually a short-term illness, but Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis D can cause long-term infections. Hepatitis E has been found only in people who have lived or traveled outside the United States.

Depending on the virus, hepatitis can be spread in a number of ways, including:

- Contact with the stool of an infected person (hepatitis A)
- Eating shellfish from waters contaminated with sewage (hepatitis A)
- Contact with the blood, vaginal fluids, semen or breast milk of an infected person (hepatitis B)
- Unprotected sex (hepatitis B and C)
- Sharing contaminated needles (hepatitis B, C and D)

Since the early 1990s, improved techniques for screening donated blood have greatly reduced the risk of catching hepatitis B or C from blood transfusions. According to the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), the current risk of catching hepatitis C this way is 1 in 100,000 units of transfused blood.

Source: <http://www.everydayhealth.com/publicsite>



VidaCare and Clinical Research

By Dr. Jerome Ernst, Medical Director

Clinical research has always been an important part of HIV care. Before the introducing of effective antiretroviral therapy, patients and providers were trying to get access to trials of new agents that might affect the course of this new and deadly disease. Through the pressure of activists (patients, providers and concerned citizens), drug companies began to better respond to this population's needs. The government, through the FDA, began to liberalize regulations to make it easier for patients to access promising treatments more quickly and easily. While some were concerned with the way pharmaceutical companies were doing this, no one else was making the drugs that were so needed.

Today, things have changed. There are over 20 effective antiretrovirals available. The life expectancy of someone infected with HIV has increased dramatically. Access to antiretrovirals, at least in New York, is almost universal. The urgency surrounding access to effective treatments has largely gone away.

As a result of all this, it is getting harder to find patients and providers interested in clinical trials of newer agents. Except for patients with HIV resistant to most agents for whom there is little choice but to find a new trial of a new agent, people seem to have lost interest in clinical trials for antiretrovirals. Studies of drugs designed to treat co morbidities such as neuropathy, lipodystrophy and diarrhea have less trouble recruiting.



I believe this new attitude on the part of the HIV community, both providers and patients, to be shortsighted. We still have patients developing resistance. Indeed, even with the best adherence, 30-40% of patients on ARVs will become resistant. Side effects will also force patients to look for alternative ARVs. Without a renewed enthusiasm for clinical trials, we will find ourselves once more facing a time when there are not enough new agents available to the patient to suppress the virus. We need to act now to prevent this from happening. Enrollment in clinical trials is important not just for the future but for current patients who one day may need access to new drugs. And, given the possibility of even earlier initiation of ARV therapy, that time may be here sooner than we think.

Gift Cards for YOU!!!

MEMBER HEALTH PROMOTION BENEFITS

Did you know that **you can earn up to \$50 per year** for completing any of the following health promotion activities:



1. **Healthy Starts:** New members receive a **\$10.00 gift card** for completing their initial primary care visit within 30 days of VidaCare membership (one time only);
2. **Health Promotion:** Members earn one **\$10.00 gift card** every 90 days for completing a basic primary care visit and HIV monitoring (a viral load and CD4 count); and
3. **Rose Program:** Once a year, female members, may earn a **\$25.00 gift card** for completing a comprehensive women's health assessment.

It's All About YOU!!! MEMBER SATISFACTION



VidaCare is committed to providing you - **OUR MEMBER** - with excellent care, service and personal attention! There are **FOUR WAYS** that you give us feedback.

1. First, you can **call Member Services**. Help is available to you 24 hours a day 7 days a week, by calling 1-800-556-0689. You can call with questions, concerns or complaints.

To insure that your needs are met and your voice is heard, we also do the following:

- 2 A **Mini-Satisfaction Survey** for new members;
- 3 Annual **Member Satisfaction Survey** - You are rewarded \$5.00 for answering the questions about your satisfaction with VidaCare; and
- 4 VidaCare **Town Hall Meetings** will be held twice a year at specified community locations so you can voice your concerns, needs, complaints and/or suggestions. **Plan to attend of these upcoming meetings:**

St Mary's Episcopal Center - Thursday, April 17, 2008 (11 - 1pm)

Housing Works 9th St - Tuesday, April 22, 2008 (11 - 1pm)

Housing Works ENY - Wednesday, April 23, 2008 (11 - 1pm)

HELP/PSI Bronx - Wednesday, April 30, 2008 (11 - 1pm)

Promesa ADHC - Friday, May 2, 2008 (11 - 1pm)

Housing Works 13th St - Wednesday, May 7, 2008 (11- 1pm)

Village Center for Care - Wednesday, May 14, 2008 (12 - 2pm)

Harlem United - May 15, 2008 (11-1pm)

Remember, your satisfaction is important to us!

While we do our best, we need you to tell us how we can make the Plan better and how to improve your experience.

Call us at 1-800-556-0689, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to voice your opinion or get information.

Member Services is here for you!



Ruperto Johnson,
Member Services Director

Lorraine Soto, Member
Services Representative



Member Advisory Council

The **Member Advisory Council (MAC)** has been helping us to ensure that VidaCare is responsive to our members' needs since the very beginning of VidaCare in 2003.

Elections for new MAC representatives will be held this spring during Member Town Hall Meetings (see dates on page 6) during April and May. During the meetings, we will ask members to volunteer or to nominate two peers from each ADHC site to be on the ballot.

In the meantime, we'd like to encourage you to consider participating in the election by introducing you to three MAC members who have graciously volunteered their time to represent their peers.

Many of the MAC Representatives who are serving today have completed several consecutive one-year terms. They have lots of wisdom to share with VidaCare members who are considering volunteering their time by serving on the MAC.

Allen Cox was one of the first people to join VidaCare. Soon after signing up, he was elected by his peers at **Village Care** to represent them on the MAC. He also represented members on VidaCare's Board of Directors for two years.

VidaCare: *What was the most important experience for you as a MAC member?*

Allen: Being on the Board of Directors and being a part of the governing body of VidaCare. To be part of the decision making process of a corporation was very moving, not only as a consumer representative, but as a poor black man who isn't supposed to be having this opportunity.

VidaCare: *What impact has being a MAC member had on your life?*

Allen: It has given me an opportunity to do what I have committed my life to – to not be victimized by who I am as a poor person who grew up in the projects and has the virus. It is an environment where you can grow. It pushes you to go beyond yourself.

VidaCare: *What advice would you give a new MAC member?*

Allen: To be honest, at first I wanted to put a little money in my pocket. But once I got involved, I had to do the work... to listen to others. To get the most out of it and to be effective, you have to want to represent your peers. Remember that you are representing the members, it is not all about you. At the same time, your opinion is valued and you are able to bring your whole self.

Mary Kancso joined VidaCare in 2005 and was elected to the MAC by her peers from **Promesa** in 2007.

VidaCare: *What made you want to be a MAC member?*

Mary: I was so private about being positive until I found out that I could get help. I was devastated and ready to go back to using, but they told me that I could have a whole life. After I got help, I wanted to help others.



VidaCare: *What's the biggest contribution that the MAC has made to VidaCare?*

Mary: The Live Your Life events! We helped to create them and we encourage members to come. We tell them that "life" isn't just about going to doctors and taking medications. It's also about your mind and soul. The *Live Your Life* events are for relaxation, getting away from the tough stuff in your life. They teach you how to get through the rat race.

VidaCare: *What advice would you give a new MAC member?*

Mary: I would give a new member all the support and confidence that they need to succeed. This is the best thing to get into for yourself. It is an opportunity to further your education about HIV and it helps you communicate with people much better. It is good for your quality of life.

Michael Fishman has represented *Harlem United* with his co-representative Linda Smalls since the first MAC meeting in 2005. He and Linda also served on the board of directors for two years.

VidaCare: *What made you want to be a MAC member?*

Michael: I like advocacy, and empowering others. I saw being a MAC member as an opportunity for me to advocate for my peers. Truthfully, it gives me a chance to shine.

VidaCare: *What has being a MAC member taught you?*

Michael: It's not just about me, it is about other people. I have learned new ways to empower and work well with others. Even though I may not agree with what other people say, I have learned to listen to their ideas and to find consensus by the end of our MAC meeting. And, I have made new friends this way.

VidaCare: *What qualities should we look for in a good MAC member?*

Michael: MAC members need to be involved in their agency and with the other members. They need to come to meetings prepared to work. They need to be serious about the responsibility, but also be able to have fun!



VidaCare Member Advisory Council MAC Meetings Schedule

Wednesday, February 27, 2008 from 2:30 - 4:00pm

Finalize Spring Plans

April & May 2008

Member Meetings held at ADCHs

Wednesday, June 18, 2008 from 2:30 - 4:00pm

New MAC Members begin

Wednesday, September 10, 2008 from 2:30 - 4:00pm

Finalize Fall Plans

Wednesday, November 19, 2008 from 2:30 - 4:00pm

Review Member Meetings Findings



MAC Members

From left to right: Linda, Allen, Juanita, Eddie,
Mary, Francis and Michael