

# HIV OUTPATIENT CLINIC MARKS 20 YEARS



Drs. Cathi Fontenot, Michael Kaiser, and Michael Butler were among the speakers at the HOP ceremony.

**New Orleans** -- The LSU Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans HIV Outpatient Clinic (HOP) observed its twentieth year of serving HIV/AIDS patients in the New Orleans metropolitan area on Friday, May 18, 2007, with an anniversary program.

In the mid-1980s, as HIV rapidly spread in New Orleans, the Charity Hospital Department of Medicine Infectious Disease Clinic treated HIV patients. In 1986, Dr. Ted Wisniewski and others petitioned the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for funding for an HIV clinic.

As a result, in 1987, HOP opened its doors to assist the growing number of patients diagnosed HIV positive. More than 100 people received care that first year. In 2005, more than 3,300 patients received care. Since the early 1980's, more than 13,000 HIV/AIDS patients have been reported in the New Orleans area.

"In 1987 the clinic was a national model for bringing

together a comprehensive system of care for people living with HIV," said Dr. Michael Kaiser, associate chief medical officer for the LSU Health Care Services Division and one of the clinic's founders. "In 2007 it is still the place where the vast majority of people in the New Orleans area get their care."

Innovative HOP patient services have received national recognition, and HOP staff devotes itself to teaching others HIV care and advocacy on the local, state, and national levels for services for the HIV-infected and affected.

Post-Katrina, the clinic continues to provide care to HIV/AIDS patients, now more than 6,000 in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Tammany, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, St. Charles, St. John, and St. James parishes. The HOP Clinic is restoring its "one-stop shop" option for HIV care. In addition to primary care, HOP offers access to dental, psychiatry, gastroenterology, pulmonology, dermatology, cardiology, nephrology, pain management, and OB/GYN.

"The importance of the clinic is highlighted by the fact that it was one of the first two clinics opened in New Orleans after the storm," Dr. Kaiser said.

Katrina scattered HOP staff nationwide, but a critical mass remained in Louisiana, and, within two weeks of the storm, staff were seeing patients at Earl K. Long Medical Center, said Dr. Lynn Besch, HIV division director and associate professor of clinical medicine in infectious diseases.

"EKL graciously gave us support," she said. "In three months we saw 280 patients." Staff weekly drove to Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center in Houma, where the LJCRC pharmacy filled prescriptions.

When Rita hit, the LSU HCSD safety net again fell into place. HOP staff saw patients at University Medical Center in Lafayette, she said.

Despite the disruption of services due to the hurricanes, HOP is committed to the provision of a health care system that improves client outcomes, protects client confidentiality, maximizes client and community input, and respects the cultural diversity of clients and staff.

Guest speakers at the program were Drs. Michael Butler, Michael Kaiser, Dwayne Thomas, Cathi Fontenot, and Rob Marier, who was MCLNO medical director when the clinic opened, and Harlee Kutzen, R.N., who was the clinic's first director. Besides a reception, the event included a health fair and exhibits.