Dear Friends,

Today, December 1, is World AIDS Day; the theme for this year is "Focus, Partner, Achieve: An AIDS-free Generation." World AIDS Day is observed annually on December 1 and is committed to raising awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of the HIV infection. AIDS has killed more than 36 million people worldwide, and today an estimated 35.3 million people are living with HIV.

While recent improved access to antiretroviral treatment in many parts of the world is admirable, the AIDS epidemic still claims an estimated 2 million lives every year, 270,000 of which are children. An HIV-positive mother who is not being treated for her HIV during pregnancy, labor, or delivery, has a 25% chance of passing the virus to her baby. Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Perinatal HIV Program was established to mitigate this risk and deliver HIV-free babies and establish lasting relationships with patients to offer long-term support and care.

Sincerely,

The Institute Staff

The Northwestern Memorial Hospital Perinatal HIV Program

Women who are HIV positive during pregnancy require specialized and integrated obstetric and infectious disease care in order to reduce the risk of perinatal transmission of HIV. The
Northwestern Memorial Hospital Perinatal HIV Program (PHP) is an interdisciplinary, comprehensive clinic aimed at preventing mother to child transmission of HIV. This program also serves to engage HIV-infected women in the long-term health care relationships and support they need to achieve healthy lives. Programmatic support from the Women’s Board of Northwestern and the HOPE Board (http://hope-chicago.org/) enables us to provide comprehensive, innovative care that focuses on engagement, empowerment, mental health, and medication adherence.

Most of the NMH PHP patients are low income, African and African-American women between the ages of 16 and 49. The majority of women are publicly insured. Thirty-one percent are from countries in Africa where rates of HIV-infection among women are the highest in the world. Fifty-two percent are African-American women, who represent the highest number of new HIV infections among U.S. females. The majority of women are first seen during pregnancy, with small but increasing numbers presenting to clinic for preconception counseling. Mental health, substance abuse, unstable housing, poverty, stigma, discrimination, the threat of violence, and fear of disclosure are significant issues for many of our patients.

The PHP provides integrated care that includes maternal-fetal medicine, infectious disease, health psychology, nursing, pharmacy, and social work. Providers partner with patients to optimize perinatal outcomes for women with HIV during pregnancy. The NMH PHP focuses on six primary outcomes:

1) Prevention of Maternal to Child Transmission: The clinic has delivered over 500 babies since it began in 1991. During the early years, transmission rates were around 25%. With the advent of HAART in 1996 and a focus on empowering women, we had no cases of transmission from June 1996 to March 2013. Of the 420 babies delivered since 1996, 418 are HIV-negative. Two recent transmissions have taught us that we still have work to do.

2) Family Planning: All women are counseled on postpartum contraception in order to help
women time their family-building and plan future pregnancies. Assisting serodiscordant couples with safer conception is a new focus of our family planning program.

3) Engagement in long-term HIV care: Women are connected to long-term infectious disease care at Northwestern or other HIV centers in order to continue specialized care beyond pregnancy. One hundred percent of women exit the PHP with linkage to long-term HIV care.

4) Empowerment and Education: Extensive perinatal education empowers women to care for their health and families during pregnancy and beyond. The peer education ("buddy") program, mental health services, support group, and partnership with the enhanced case managers from the Pediatric AIDS Chicago Initiative Program (PACPI) (http://www.pregnantandpositive.org/programs/) provide critical resources that empower women to maintain long-term HAART adherence and linkage with HIV care.

5) Training the Next Generation: The clinic integrates students, residents and fellows from the fields of Infectious Disease, Ob Gyn, Pharmacy, Psychology and Social Work. We are fortunate to share the lessons our patients teach us about perseverance and dignity as they challenge us to explore health belief models different from our own and to become more culturally competent providers of care.

6) Advancing Knowledge: Patients and providers actively participate in local and national studies that advance knowledge and improve our ability to provide high quality care to women and children with HIV.

In 1996, the Women’s HIV Program at the Infectious Disease Center at Northwestern Memorial Hospital was established to work miracles. Through this important program, hundreds of babies born to HIV-positive mothers, have come into the world free of HIV.

The program's two recent cases of HIV transmission remind clinicians of how difficult it is to eliminate HIV perinatal transmission and of the need to re-double our efforts. The PHP demonstrates that indeed "it takes a village" to promote healthy communities and reduce perinatal transmission rates of HIV. This multidisciplinary clinic is committed to a Chicago without AIDS. Together we can make a difference.

Author: Sarah Sutton, MD, Medical Director, NMH Antimicrobial Stewardship Program Division of Infectious Diseases, Department of Internal Medicine, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern
HIV in the United States

Fast Facts:

- More than 1.2 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV infection
- 14% of people living with HIV are unaware of their infection
- 50,000 new HIV infections occur each year

Signs and Symptoms:

The symptoms of HIV vary depending on the individual and stage of the disease, but many people experience flu-like symptoms within 2-4 weeks of infection. The only way to know for sure if you are infected with HIV is to get tested!
Institute Happenings

December 3, 2014: Women in STEM: Connect; the evening will feature a lively Q&A, followed by networking.

December 16, 2014, 12:00-1:00pm, WHRI Research Forum on Women and Stroke, featuring Dr. Illana Ruff, Assistant Professor, Neurology, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University: register today! Title: Unique Risk Factors for Ischemic Stroke in Women

WHRI in the News

Dr. Teresa Woodruff, Women's Health Research Institute Director, was cited in National Geographic's Why It's Crucial to Get More Women Into Science

Katherine Wisner, MD, Member of WHRI Leadership Council, Coauthored "Pregnant Women Must Be Studied Too," published in The Conversation

Dr. Melina Kibbe and Dr. Teresa Woodruff featured in "Where Are All the Female Test Subjects?"