

Health

Nurses warn about STDs

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Statistics about sexually transmitted diseases don't usually pop up in movies, TV shows or commercials laden with sexual content, Linda Greve charged.

"Hollywood makes things look so wonderful," remarked Greve, a registered nurse and parishioner at Pitsford's Church of the Transfiguration.

The reality, Greve said, is that one of every six teenagers contracts a sexually transmitted disease each year in the United States. She added that STD contraction rates are at an all-time high, and that Rochester ranks among the top six cities in the nation for percentage of teens and adults who contract gonorrhea.

Overall, Greve noted, there are more than 25 sexually transmitted diseases, among them AIDS, herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea and human papilloma virus (HPV). Four of the STDs can be deadly, whereas others can cause such health consequences as cancer, increased infertility and insanity.

And advocates of contraceptive use fail to note that condoms and birth control pills do not prevent STDs from being transmitted, said Linda Carter-Jessop, a family nurse practitioner.

"The 'safe sex' message is that if you do this, you're safe. In fact, we want kids to know there's a great risk — that you're not 100 percent protected. It's kind of like playing Russian roulette," Carter-Jessop commented.

In an effort to keep young people better informed about STDs

and other sexual issues, Carter-Jessop and Greve have spent many volunteer hours conducting programs in the Rochester area to promote abstinence.

"Kids, we find for the most part, have this attitude that (a sexually transmitted disease) only happens to other people," Carter-Jessop remarked. "But they can contract these diseases as soon as they become sexually active."

Carter-Jessop recalled the anguished reaction of a teen girl when informed that she had contracted an STD.

"She just dissolved into tears," Carter-Jessop remarked. "She said, 'What does this mean for my life? Will I be able to have children? What will people say? Can I ever have a close relationship?' The consequences of STDs are that they just don't go away, they're with you for life."

Greve noted that although STDs can victimize people of all ages, two-thirds of all STDs are contracted by people under the age of 25.

Many of these diseases are incurable and produce unpleasant side effects. Herpes, for example, is characterized by the eruption of blisters on the genitals; and HPV is distinguished by genital warts. For women, HPV can also be a precursor to cervical cancer.

Carter-Jessop said that HPV — as well as herpes, the HIV infection and hepatitis B — can lead to death. In addition, she said, gonorrhea and chlamydia cause infertility in both males and females; and syphilis, in its chronic stages, provokes insanity.

Moreover, the discovery that

one has an STD is a source of acute embarrassment, Greve said.

"What many teens don't know is that many of their friends have these diseases. But it's not the kind of thing you even tell your best friend," Greve pointed out.

Greve collaborates occasionally with Carter-Jessop but conducts most of her abstinence programs with another Transfiguration parishioner, Genny Hurley.

Greve said she and Hurley — who is also a registered nurse — promote abstinence in a manner that "goes beyond Catholic teaching and the risk of pregnancy."

"It's the medical approach, which is a very nice companion to the emotional, sociological and religious approach," Greve said.

Meanwhile, the pair helps Carter-Jessop, Michael Peace and James W. Heath Jr. — who both serve as youth workers at Rochester's Bethel Full Gospel Church — to offer extensive abstinence programs at Rochester's Frederick Douglass Junior High School twice per year.

Sandra Suy, 14, took the Frederick Douglass classes last fall as an eighth-grader. She said the sessions provided vital information that people in her age group should know immediately.

"The sooner, the better," Sandra stated. She remarked that without such education, people her age might contract an STD "by mistake, because they didn't know what they're doing."

Sandra added that "most everybody in the class was shocked" upon learning that condoms do not stop the transmission of STDs.

Carter-Jessop, Peace and Heath



Art courtesy of Family Research Council.

also conduct seminars for adults on teen abstinence. One such program took place at Church of the Transfiguration on May 18.

Clyde Cutter, a Transfiguration parishioner, said he and his wife, Laura, attended the program so they could pass vital facts along to their children.

"We want to know as much as we can to help them," said Cutter, whose children are ages 13, 12 and 5.

The May 18 program was one of many recent efforts by Church

of the Transfiguration to spread the message of abstinence. In addition, Molly Kelly, a nationally recognized abstinence advocate, appeared at the parish in 1995 and will return there for another lecture Oct. 22.

The message of abstinence is vital during a time when STD contraction rates are steadily climbing, Carter-Jessop said.

"If we don't get this message out to the students and families, it will continue. We just can't wait," Carter-Jessop concluded.

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