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SHEA News

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Mandatory Infection Control Education for Healthcare Workers in Florida

In 1988, the Florida legislature enacted one of the most comprehensive state laws to address human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. This legislation, dubbed the Comprehensive AIDS Act, dealt with issues that include confidentiality, discrimination, procedures for testing persons for HIV antibodies, legal protection for physicians notifying spouses of HIV-infected partners, penalties for HIV-infected persons who knowingly expose others, insurability, and establishment of regional patient care networks.

A major emphasis was placed on education. The state department of health and rehabilitation services (HRS) was directed to develop educational material for all citizens of the state and provide a defined body of information to high school students, teachers, counselors, law enforcement officers, inmates and staff of correctional facilities, and all healthcare professionals licensed by the state of Florida. Age-appropriate instructional material was to be developed for children at the elementary, secondary, and college levels.

The department of professional regulation was directed to require that all persons applying for initial licensure or relicensure to the following boards complete an

approved course of instruction: acupuncture, medicine, osteopathy, chiropractic, podiatry, optometry, nursing, pharmacy, dentistry, dental hygiene, dental laboratories, nursing home administrators, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists, funeral directing, embalming and direct deposition, physiotherapy, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, lay midwives, radiology technologists, and clinical laboratory personnel.

In 1991, additional legislation was passed, making AIDS education a continuing requirement. For physicians, two hours were required for relicensure after the three-hour course required for initial licensure. The courses must provide information about modes of transmission, infection control procedures, prevention of HIV/AIDS infection, current Florida law and its impact on testing, confidentiality of HIV test results, clinical management, and treatment of patients. The 1991 legislation also required that all employees of hospitals, nursing homes, adult congregate living facilities, home health agencies, and hospices licensed by the department of HRS complete AIDS education courses biennially and that the facility maintain records of attendance.

The AIDS education require-

ment is being met in many ways. Most hospitals provide courses through their ongoing continuing medical education programs. Local medical societies, medical schools, and various other organizations also frequently offer courses approved by the department of HRS.

Florida is one of only a few states that have passed legislation requiring periodic education of physicians and other healthcare professionals on the epidemiology and prevention of HIV infection and other bloodborne diseases. As more states develop such programs, we encourage members of SHEA to take an active part in writing the legislation, developing regulations based on the legislation, and preparing educational courses for the education of healthcare workers. The pool of SHEA members in each state represents the most important source of expertise for consultation and guidance of state governments in the development of these programs. The editors would like to hear from members who live in states where these programs have been legislated and instituted, as well as from members who are from states where such programs are under consideration or active development.