

# SEARCHC healthbeat

SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium  
a bi-monthly newsletter from your partner in health

## SEARCHC is among the nation's leaders in telebehavioral health



The SEARCHC telebehavioral health program has become a model for other programs around the nation.

In July, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt came to Alaska for a demonstration of the SEARCHC telebehavioral health program. Telebehavioral health uses distance delivery videoconferencing technology to link a patient in one community with a provider in another. The SEARCHC telebehavioral health program provides confidential psychiatric, behavioral health and substance abuse services to patients in ten remote communities — Angoon, Haines, Hydaburg, Juneau, Kake, Klawock, Klukwan, Pelican, Petersburg and Thorne Bay — with management from the SEARCHC Haa Toowóo Náakw Hít Behavioral Health Clinic in Sitka.

*“We do more telebehavioral health than any other program in the state,”* SEARCHC Director of Behavioral Health Pat Hefley said, adding that SEARCHC was one of the first organizations in Alaska to develop a program. Pat said the

program *“is very effective and it’s much more efficient for people living in remote communities.”* It also provides access to advanced providers.

During his recent visit to Juneau, Sec. Leavitt met with a patient from Kake using the telebehavioral health system. The Secretary then wrote in his blog that the patient appreciated the extra confidentiality that came from being able to talk to someone from outside her community. *“She said, ‘In a small village like where I live, it is impossible to talk with anybody without others knowing your problems. Being able to do it this way gives me the comfort I need to feel safe.’”*

Rand West, the director of Haa Toowóo Náakw Hít and coordinator of the telebehavioral health program, said patients appreciate not having to leave their families and take time off work to travel for an appointment.

*“Their support network is at home,”* added Carolyn Lemmon, the acting director of the SEARCHC Community Family Services Program. *“They have a provider in the village, a Community Family Services Worker, who is a known person they can keep in touch with. The clients feel better and it’s easier for them.”* ❀

## A Message from the President



*Most of us have been impacted by cancer, with family members, close friends or even ourselves being diagnosed with the disease. Cancer can change our lives forever.*

*Most forms of cancer can be treated if they are caught early enough. Many types of cancer can be prevented through healthy eating habits, regular physical activity and quitting tobacco.*

*Early detection is why the SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program partners with Bartlett Regional Hospital to provide annual mobile mammogram van trips to several of Southeast Alaska's smaller communities. This way women can receive screenings without leaving home.*

*SEARHC also is partnering with the Alaska Native Epidemiology Center on a new colorectal cancer screening navigator demonstration project. Screening navigators will work with the SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program to provide screening, education and follow-up care to people at risk for colorectal cancers.*

*Alaska Natives have increasing rates for several types of cancers, and SEARHC encourages patients to get the screenings, treatment and support needed to reduce cancer's impact.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Helgesen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Your partner in health*

# SEARHC gets funding to run colorectal cancer screening project

The Alaska Native Epidemiology Center and SEARHC are teaming up to run a new colorectal cancer screening navigator demonstration project.

The colorectal cancer screening navigators will improve access to screening and follow-up care for Alaska Native people living in Southeast Alaska. The screening navigators will ensure patients receive a timely diagnosis and treatment by guiding them through the health care system, helping patients make and keep screening appointments while tracking results to make sure follow-up care is completed.

*"We are excited about applying the experience gained through our Breast and Cervical Health Program to screening, outreach and patient tracking for colorectal cancer,"* said SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program Director Roz DeRensis, who will oversee the colorectal cancer screening navigator demonstration project. *"Just like with breast cancer, people can lower their risk of developing colorectal cancer by staying active, eating healthy food, not using tobacco products and getting screened."*

Colorectal cancers are cancers of the colon and/or rectum, and Alaska Natives have substantially higher rates of colorectal cancers compared to other ethnic groups. Screening with a colonoscopy can detect and remove precancerous growths. The chances for successful treatment are greatly improved when colorectal cancer is found at an early stage.

The screening navigators will identify patients who are at higher risk for colorectal cancer — such as those age 50 or older who have never been screened or those with strong family histories of colorectal cancers — and help them get screened. If cancer is discovered, the screening navigators will work with the other members of the cancer care team (physicians, nurses, social workers, etc.) to guide patients through the health care system so they get the care they need to fight the disease.

SEARHC will have two screening navigators located in Juneau and Sitka. To learn more about the SEARHC colorectal cancer screening navigator project, contact Roz DeRensis at 966-8743. ❁



# Idea that natural tobacco is safer or healthier is just a smoke screen



There are several brands of cigarettes that promote their “natural” and “additive-free” tobacco. Some smokers have switched to these brands thinking they are safer cigarettes. But there is no such thing as a safe cigarette.

*“Don’t be fooled by the marketing scam,”* said Andrea Thomas, director of the SEARHC Tobacco Prevention Program. *“You think it’ll be healthier, but it still damages your lungs and your heart. These ‘natural’ cigarettes have four or more times the nicotine as other cigarettes, and nicotine is the addictive ingredient.”*

The most common brand of natural tobacco found in Southeast Alaska is Natural American Spirit, which makes a variety of products in cigarette and loose-tobacco form.

According to a study by the Oregon Health and Science University, Natural American Spirit had the highest level of “free-base” nicotine (36 percent) when compared to other popular brands. Free-base nicotine is the type of nicotine thought to be the most addictive. The American Spirit cigarette’s level was significantly higher than that found in a Marlboro (four times higher), a Camel (13 times) or a Winston (six times).

*“Natural tobacco often contains higher concentrations of tar and nicotine, and the smoke has greater levels of toxic chemicals such as carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, ammonia and carcinogenic hydrocarbons. This not only increases the smoker’s risk of developing lung cancer or other diseases, but it also jeopardizes the health of everyone in the*

*room,”* the American Lung association reports on its website.

*“Natural doesn’t mean healthy,”* Andrea said. *“Arsenic, asbestos, plutonium are all natural, but they’re poisons. Natural tobacco is just as deadly as other tobacco products.”*

Many natural tobacco brands aim their ads at smokers who are conscious about their health and environment. These brands also target Native Americans and play on the mystique of sacred tobacco use. The logo for Natural American Spirit features a Native American smoking a peace pipe, even though the Santa Fe Natural Tobacco Company, the company that manufactures the brand, is not Native owned. Santa Fe is a division of R.J. Reynolds, the world’s second-largest tobacco company (makers of Camel, Winston, Kool, Pall Mall and other brands).

So what does Natural American Spirit say? All of its tobacco products and ads carry the following disclaimer (required by the Federal Trade Commission), *“No additives in our tobacco does NOT mean a safer cigarette.”* Another disclaimer on the Natural American Spirit website reads: *“Smoking our all natural or organic tobacco does not reduce the serious health risks of smoking.”*

To learn about the dangers of natural tobacco or get help quitting tobacco, call the toll-free SEARHC tobacco quit line at 1-888-966-8875. ❀

## SEARHC to increase screening and awareness of domestic violence

SEARHC patients may have noticed a new set of screening questions during recent appointments to see their medical providers.

The patients are being asked questions — such as “*Does anybody hit you?*” or “*Does anybody put you down?*” — as part of a stepped-up screening for domestic violence. In addition to asking these questions of all patients, providers are watching for other domestic violence red flags such as bruises, missed appointments or patient instructions that were not followed, and chronic conditions such as headaches, stomach aches and muscle pain.

*“Alaska has one of the highest domestic violence rates in the country, with more than 6,000 reported cases in 2005 alone,”* said Nancy Jo Bleier, Director of Social Services for Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital and coordinator of SEARHC’s Domestic Violence (DV) Task Force. *“October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Oct. 8 is Health Cares About Domestic Violence Day, so we’re trying to screen more and make people aware of the effects domestic violence has on a person’s health.”*

The task force is working with local domestic violence groups to educate people about how domestic violence impacts families. The task force also is training staff about how to screen for DV.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that more than three out of every four Alaska Native or American Indian women will be physically assaulted in their lifetimes. Alaska’s rate of rape is 2 1/2 times the national average, and more than one out of every three Alaska Native or American Indian women will be raped in their lifetimes.

The task force recently produced several new information cards that can be found at all SEARHC clinics, usually in the restrooms. These cards feature information about domestic violence and contact numbers for the shelters in Southeast Alaska — Cordova (Cordova Family Resource Center or CFRC, 1-866-790-4357), Juneau (Aiding Women in Abuse and Rape Emergencies or AWARE, 1-800-478-1090), Sitka (Sitkans Against Family Violence or SAFV, 1-800-478-6511) and Ketchikan (Women In Safe Homes or WISH, 1-800-478-9474).

People can learn more about domestic violence by visiting the following websites: <http://www.endabuse.org/> or <http://www.andvsa.org/>. ❀

## Breast health is year-round concern

The unexplained increase in breast cancer among Alaska Native women finally may be leveling off, but there is no sign of a decline just yet. The disease once was relatively rare among Alaska Native women, but now it matches the rate for white women nationwide and is 1 1/2 times the rate for Lower 48 Natives.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which is the perfect time to begin a tradition of prevention. It’s important to make breast health a year-round concern.

*“National Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a good time to remember to schedule your annual screenings,”* SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program Health Educator Susan Suarez said. *“Early detection with annual clinical breast exams and mammograms is the best protection against breast cancer. Please encourage your mother, sisters and friends to get screened this month.”*

Women should start having yearly mammograms by age 40, earlier if there is a family history of breast cancer. If you notice any changes to your breasts, such as a new lump or skin changes, make an appointment to see your health care provider.

Making simple lifestyle changes — such as eating healthy foods, staying physically active, limiting alcohol and quitting tobacco — are great ways to prevent breast cancer. A healthy weight also can lower your risk. ❀

## Around the Consortium

### **Klawock, Haines**

The Commission On Laboratory Accreditation has awarded the COLA Laboratory Excellence Award to the labs at both the Alicia Roberts Medical Center in Klawock and the Haines Health Center. To earn the awards, the SEARHC laboratories met 100 percent of the COLA criteria for safety and patient care. The criteria includes on-site surveys, proficiency testing and having no valid complaints filed against them over the past year.

### **Juneau**

International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day is Sept. 9, and Tlingit Native flute player Morgan Fawcett will be joined by Australian indigenous didgeridoo player Ash Dargan for a series of events that week. Highlights include a community concert on Sept. 7 at Juneau-Douglas High School, a wellness walk and suicide vigil on Sept. 9, flute workshops and youth recording sessions on Sept. 10-12, and an Honoring Our Elders luncheon on Sept. 13. For event info, contact Norene Otnes at 463-6670.

### **Sitka**

On Oct. 4, there will be a three-mile breast cancer awareness walk starting at 9 a.m. behind Brenner's Fine Clothing and Gifts. Later in the day will be the dedication of new artwork added to the Sitka Cancer Survivors' Society Path of Hope at Moller Park. For info, call Susan Suarez at 966-8459.

From June 30 to July 4, a volunteer group from the University of Connecticut Dental School provided 24 new sets of dentures valued at about \$2,000 each to elders from Angoon, Kake, Hoonah, Yakutat, Juneau and Sitka. The volunteer group, which included oral and maxillofacial surgeons, also provided 11 implants worth around \$4,000-\$5,000 each to patients to help stabilize and retain their lower dentures.

### **Klawock**

SEARHC, the Alicia Roberts Medical Center and ARMC Building Attendant Supervisor Don Nickerson combined to receive six national award nominations for their use of the Operating System 1 (OS1)<sup>®</sup> cleaning system. SEARHC was nominated for Cleaning Program of the Year, Cleaning Industry Pioneer, Cleaning Industry Communications and Environmental Cleaning Program. ARMC was nominated for Cleaning Industry Peer Influence, and Don was nominated for Cleaning Industry Trainer of the Year. ARMC also earned an (OS1)<sup>®</sup> Green-Certified Program award for 2008.

### **Angoon, Haines, Juneau, Kake, Klukwan, Sitka**

WISE At Every Size (WAES) classes begin at various times in September. WAES is for women of all sizes, and the classes focus on healthful eating, fun physical activity and positive body image. For info, call the SEARHC WISEWOMAN program at 1-888-388-8782.

### **Ketchikan**

SEARHC Lifestyle Balance program staff will be in Ketchikan Oct. 8-11 to help perform biometric screenings during the ANB/ANS Grand Camp. These screenings are free and a good way to monitor blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

### **Haines, Skagway, Klawock, Craig, Metlakatla**

The mobile mammogram van has upcoming visits to Haines (Aug. 28 to Sept. 10), Skagway (Sept. 16-18), Klawock (Sept. 26 to Oct. 9), Craig (Oct. 10 and 13) and Metlakatla (Oct. 17-23). Call your local clinic to schedule a mammogram, or call the SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program at 1-888-388-8782 (toll-free in Alaska) for information about free clinical breast exams and mammograms for women ages 40-64 who meet income and insurance guidelines. The mobile mammogram program is a partnership between the SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program and Bartlett Regional Hospital.

## Patient Tip: As daylight fades, be safe and seen

This is the time of year when Alaska gets dark earlier at night and the sun rises later in the day. It's also a time when more school children are outside walking along our roads.

Vehicles kill an estimated 5,700 pedestrians in the United States each year, and one out of every seven of them are children. Alaska ranks second among states in pedestrian deaths per capita. The following tips will help pedestrians and cyclists to be safer, and they also will make drivers more aware that pedestrians and cyclists are sharing the roads.

- ◆ **Wear reflectors.** Iron-on reflective tape, reflective ankle and arm bands and similar reflective items make it easier for drivers to see you.
- ◆ **Carry a flash light** or glow stick when you walk at night.
- ◆ **Walk facing traffic**, so you can see cars coming toward you and they can see you walking toward them. Don't assume drivers can see you.
- ◆ **When you ride a bike at night**, make sure you have a working solid white headlight on the front of your bike and red reflectors or a flashing red taillight on the back. Cyclists should ride with traffic, not facing it.
- ◆ **Be aware of your surroundings** by keeping your eyes and ears open at all times so you can see when cars enter traffic. This means turning off your music player and hanging up your cell phone.
- ◆ **Watch for blind spots in the road**, such as curves, trees and signs that can block a driver's view of you and your view of cars.
- ◆ **Car windows frost over during the fall and winter**, so drivers need to clean off their windows and turn on the defroster so they can see.
- ◆ **Oct. 8, 2008, is International Walk (or Bike) To School Day.** Go to <http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/> for more safety tips and information about how you can promote safe walking and cycling for kids in your neighborhood.