

# Introduction:

## The Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center

ANGELA DIAZ, M.D.

---

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE on adolescent health care commemorates the 35th anniversary of the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center (AHC). Dr. Joan Morgenthau founded the Center within the Department of Pediatrics in 1968. AHC has had three directors: Dr. Morgenthau (1968–1972); Dr. Les Jaffe (1972–1989); and Dr. Angela Diaz, since 1989.

Over the past 35 years, the AHC has earned a national reputation as being one of the largest and most comprehensive health care centers in the country dedicated exclusively to youths aged 10–21 and their children. AHC's mission has been to provide comprehensive, adolescent-friendly, culturally sensitive and age-appropriate health services to adolescents in New York City and beyond. Services are provided regardless of ability to pay, confidentiality is maintained, and there are no geographic restrictions.

### AHC Services

AHC uses a culture-centered interdisciplinary approach to the physical, reproductive, and mental health of adolescents, in addition to providing education and related services. Most important, AHC staff strives to build the skills of the young people it serves so they can become responsible health care consumers. AHC's comprehensive medical services include primary and specialty care, acute care, health education and risk reduction support. Reproductive health services include pelvic examinations, pap smears, pregnancy testing, pregnancy

options counseling, family planning services and colposcopy, as well as screening and testing for sexually transmitted infections and HIV. AHC's mental health services include psychotherapy, psychoeducation and crisis intervention for individuals, families, and groups. Group programs assist survivors of sexual abuse, incest and rape; HIV-infected and -affected youth; substance abusers; young women with same sex partners; depressed girls; and more.

### Community-Based Programs

In 1982, AHC established New York's first high-school-based health center at the Manhattan Center for Science and Math High School, and in 1983 AHC began a second high-school-based health center at the Julia Richman Education Complex. Both centers see thousands of adolescents every year for medical and mental health services and health education.

In 1988, AHC began the Sinai Peers Encouraging Empowerment through Knowledge (SPEEK) peer-education program, which employs the AHC's patients and local adolescents as peer educators in HIV/AIDS prevention education. SPEEK peer educators participate in a 60-hour training curriculum and then offer a wide variety of HIV/AIDS prevention, advocacy, and peer-to-peer activities at AHC, community agencies and schools, and at various local and citywide forums. Under the supervision of peer-education supervisors and a health educator, SPEEK peer educators conduct workshops in schools and communities, and develop health education materials for patients at the AHC.

### Training Programs

AHC educates health care professionals from all over the United States and other coun-

---

From the Division of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, The Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY.

Address all correspondence to Angela Diaz, M.D., Director, Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, 320 East 94th Street, 2nd floor, New York, NY 10128; email: [angela.diaz@msnyuhealth.org](mailto:angela.diaz@msnyuhealth.org)

tries to become expert care providers, leaders and advocates for teens. AHC staff members, including physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, health educators and nutritionists, serve as trainers and supervisors. Trainees include: medical students, residents, physicians, and graduate students from various programs, including nursing, social work, psychology, health education, health administration, and more. Finally, AHC staff integrates mentoring into its medical student and resident training programs.

In 1972, AHC began its Adolescent Medicine Fellowship program for individuals who have completed their residency in pediatrics, internal medicine, medicine/pediatrics or family practice and want to specialize in adolescent medicine. This program is currently one of about twenty accredited adolescent medicine fellowships in the country. (Adolescent medicine, a relatively new field, officially became recognized as a subspecialty in 1994.)

### **Center for Excellence**

In 2000, AHC was designated one of two regional Centers for Excellence (CfE) in adolescent health by the New York State Department of Health. With a grant from the state, the CfE provides professional assistance and training to five community partnerships in New York State that promote youth development. CfE's professional assistance includes needs assessment and strategic planning; collaboration and partnership development; development of curricula for youth programs; and developing capabilities to perform self-evaluation of programs and services. In addition, CfE works with AHC clinicians on studies involving practice-based research.

### **Milestones**

In 1968, AHC began its family planning program, and continues to provide reproductive health counseling and education to young women and men today. AHC established the first HIV/AIDS prevention program in 1987, which, five years later, received Ryan White funding for its mental health services to HIV-infected and HIV-affected youth. In 2003, AHC

was designated as a Center of Excellence in HIV services by the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute. In 2001, AHC received federal funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for its existing services to adolescents who have experienced trauma and to participate in a nationwide network of providers to increase and improve the exchange of knowledge concerning trauma services for teens.

### **Facts in Brief**

Each year, AHC has more than 100,000 visits, of whom some 50.3% were Latino, 43.5% were African-American/Afro-Caribbean, 4.1% were White, 2% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% were Native American. Approximately 50% of AHC clients reside in East Harlem and 50% come from northern Manhattan, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, the South Bronx, central Brooklyn, southeast Queens, and other communities in New York State.

AHC's core values produce outstanding results, which are measured by health outcomes, patient retention, and client satisfaction studies. These values include reducing barriers to service, building trust, treating clients with respect, encouraging parental involvement, maintaining confidentiality, offering age- and culture-appropriate services, providing support for risk factors like depression and substance abuse, and continuously reinvigorating AHC with the best practices in adolescent preventive medicine.

One excellent health care outcome with adolescents is having teen pregnancy rates that are lower than those for New York City, New York State, and the nation as a whole. The rate of pregnancy among AHC patients is 45% lower for African-American teens and 48% lower for Latino teens than in the broader teen population of New York City. AHC also has excellent outcomes in the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Since 1985, rates of chlamydial infection among African-American and Latino patients have fallen from 28% to 7% and 24% to 4%, respectively, and the overall infection rates have dropped from 25% to 8.8%, with the lowest rates noted among continuing patients.