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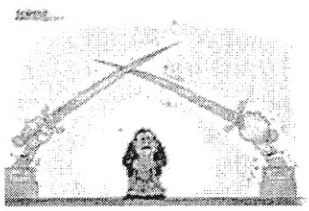

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DHS, drug company partner on diabetes program

Thursday, Jun 17, 2004

By David Robinson
Arkansas News Bureau

LITTLE ROCK - Arkansas' Department of Human Services has partnered with one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies in hopes of slowing the fast climbing number of people with type II diabetes.

Gov. Mike Huckabee, who related his own triumph over diabetes through diet and exercise, said at a news conference Wednesday that the Arkansas Diabetes Control Program would be part of his Healthy Arkansas initiative.

The Eli Lilly and Company program makes 24 diabetes education centers around the state available to the public.

The centers' focus is on nutrition and exercise education.

"Most of us quite frankly, me included, can't go it alone," said Huckabee, whose lifestyle changes enabled him about a year ago to stop taking his diabetes medicines. "Doctors can tell you 'diet and exercise, diet and exercise,' but there are a couple of other factors that also have to be there: One is encouragement and the other is accountability."

Eli Lilly, which sells diabetes medicines to the state, is also tracking the progress and medical costs of 212 Medicaid patients with diabetes who agreed to participate in the education program.

The hope is that the program will prove successful enough that Medicaid can begin to cover the cost of the service, said Julie Munsell, a DHS spokeswoman.

Six months of data show positive signs, company officials said Wednesday.

The study has found a 10 percent decrease in patients who screened positive for symptoms of depression; a 7 percent drop in those patients who were above the recommended guidelines for blood pressure; a 27 percent increase in the percentage of participants who had a hemoglobin levels recommended by the American Diabetes Association.

The company is still tabulating the final six months of data, said

Josh Smiley, director of Eli Lilly's public health sector. He would not disclose how much the company is investing, although DHS director Kurt Knickrehm said it amounts to about $2 million.

Knickrehm said there's no cost to the state.

An estimated 235,000 Arkansas adults have diabetes, 78,000 of whom are unaware they suffer from the disease, according to the Department of Human Services.

In the past 10 years, the percentage of Arkansans with the disease has risen more than 30 percent to 7.8 percent. That compares to 6.2 percent nationally, with 17 million Americans suffering from the disease.

"We worry about that," said Melody Myers, senior market director for the diabetes association. "This disease is growing."

In the trial study, the 212 Medicaid recipients from 60 counties were referred to the education centers where for a year's time they were seen by nurses, registered dietitians and diabetes educators. The patients were taught how to manage the disease.

They learned how weight, body mass index and blood pressure affect the disease, and they received counseling for stress management, which affects diabetes. Counseling and education were also provided for other physical and mental health issues, and they learned about diabetic foot care and blood glucose monitoring.

Information about the diabetes education centers is available by calling 1-800-235-0002.

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