February is American Heart Month. Generally, the term “heart disease” refers to several different heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease is coronary heart disease. In addition to being the leading cause of death in the United States, heart disease is also a major cause of disability. In 2006, more than 600,000 people in the United States died of heart disease. Furthermore, it has been estimated that every 25 seconds an American will have a coronary event.

Heart disease is usually manifested in older adults; however, the disease can begin to develop at a young age. Studies have shown that young adults are somewhat familiar with the risk factors and preventative measures for heart disease; according to these studies, up to 87% of young adults studied believe that the prevention of heart disease is important. So, how can we reduce the risk of developing heart disease in the future? Young adults can start by taking the necessary steps to prevent and control factors that typically put people at greater risk. Such factors include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking cigarettes, being overweight or obese, eating a poor diet, being physically in active, and using alcohol. A good way to combat these risk factors is by living a healthy lifestyle and managing your medical conditions.

As a student, you should try to choose healthier food items. You can help prevent high blood cholesterol by eating foods low in saturated fats and cholesterol and high in fiber. Also, you can lower your blood pressure by limiting your salt intake. Maintaining a healthy weight is equally important. Regular exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight, while also helping you lower your cholesterol and blood pressure. Additionally, students should limit alcohol use (too much can cause high blood pressure), and if you don’t smoke you shouldn’t start. If you smoke you can lower your risk of heart disease by quitting.

Managing preexisting medical conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and/or diabetes is also a good way to reduce your risk of heart disease. Have your cholesterol checked at least once every five years. If you have high blood pressure or diabetes make sure you monitor your blood pressure and/or blood sugar levels regularly. Furthermore, take your medications regularly as prescribed and talk with your health care provider. Early diagnosis and treatment may also significantly reduce your chances of developing heart disease. This Valentine’s Day show that you care and celebrate your love by being heart-healthy.

References:
Every year, people create new resolutions in order to better themselves. Although bettering our own life is still an outstanding resolution to uphold, it is also important to consider those who are less fortunate. January marks the beginning of National Blood Donor Month, which aims to show gratitude and recognition for those members of society who donate blood, organize drives and volunteer their time in order to save the lives of the unfortunate 1 in 10 hospital patients who need blood transfusions. Committing to blood donations every fifty-six days throughout the next year will be a rewarding resolution that will potentially help hundreds of people. Every two seconds, a person living in the United States needs blood for emergency trauma care, surgeries or to help care for diseases such as cancer or leukemia. 1 The need for blood is consistent and blood donation organizations, such as the Red Cross, encourage anyone who is able to donate blood.

Donating blood is a resolution that can be performed frequently throughout the year. Only fifty-six days are needed in between each donation period in order for the body to replenish the red blood cells that carry oxygen. 2 Although it may seem unsafe to donate blood, it is a completely monitored process and the trained staff is able to ensure the safety of the donor, as well as the recipient of the blood. All blood is tested for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, syphilis and other infectious diseases to guarantee that all blood donations will not infect patients with other illnesses. 3 Each time blood is donated, about one pint of blood (approximately one pound in weight) is extracted from the donor and processed within 24 to 48 hours of the donation. 4 The blood is processed into components that consist of red cells, plasma and platelets. Red blood cells are the cells that carry oxygen to and from tissues and organs, and must be used within 42 days of the donation. 4 Platelets help the body to control bleeding and must be used within five days of the donation. Plasma is the liquid part of the blood that helps prevent clots and can be frozen for up to 12 months. 4

At California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), there are on-campus opportunities available to give blood. The Red Cross attempts to hold blood drives at least once a month to allow students, faculty and staff to volunteer and donate blood during breaks, before or after classes. The entire process includes a brief medical history, mini-physical, donation, and refreshments. 2 The mini-physical is an important step that checks the donor’s temperature, blood pressure, pulse and hematocrit level ensuring that donating blood will not be harmful to the individual. 2 Even though the actual donation only takes between ten and twelve minutes, the entire session usually lasts about an hour. Before leaving the donation site, it is important to replenish the body by eating foods that will help gain strength back and decrease the likelihood of complications.

One donation can save up to three lives. Therefore, if an estimated 30,000 students attending CSULB all donated blood, 150,000 lives would be spared. Although type-O blood is considered the universal blood and can be used in any scenario, only 7% of the population has this type. It is critically important that all blood types are encouraged to donate in order to provide a greater opportunity of having a match. 3 The most common reasons people do not participate in blood drives are that they did not think of it or they fear needles. There is no better time than 2011 to overcome this fear and to commit to a selfless resolution that will improve the lives of so many in need and become a superhero!

References:

Spread Love, Not Germs

By Nancy Soto

As the year progresses and we approach Valentine’s Day (the Day of Love), students should keep in mind how important it is to spread affection, not infection. Every year thousands of people become infected with the flu, the common cold and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, all these infections can be prevented and the following article highlights specific ways to do so.

The flu interferes with a college student’s academic progress, but the 2010-2011 flu vaccine protects students against three of the most infectious virus types. 1 Always check with the CSULB Student Health Services (SHS) for availability of the current flu vaccine. Additionally, check with your local pharmacies, such as: CVS, Walgreens, and/or Target. On campus, the vaccine is offered for $15, remember, staying healthy is cheaper than purchasing medications to get better.

An excellent flu/common cold prevention step is to cover your nose and mouth with the inside crook of your elbow when you sneeze and cough, providing an excellent shield that obstructs the germs from infecting others. 2 It is important to wash your hands often in order to prevent spreading germs to your eyes, mouth and nose, and from spreading germs to others. When washing your hands, use soap and warm water or wash with an alcohol based hand sanitizer. 3 If in spite of taking all precautions, one still gets sick, be sure to make an appointment at SHS. If medications are prescribed, be sure to follow the clinician’s instructions for appropriate use in order to prevent further flu complications.

Other common bacterial and viral infections among college-age populations are STIs. Abstinence still remains the most effective form of prevention for STIs. However, many individuals are not abstinent and need to choose actions that protect them from STIs. An excellent way in which to become better educated about STIs is by attending the Sexual Health Awareness Workshop (SHAW) offered at the Health Resource Center (HRC), located in SHS, Rm 288. SHAW provides information about STI prevention and forms of contraceptives. Remember that condoms not only provide protection against STIs, but also prevent pregnancy. If sexually active, test yearly for STIs at the SHS. Another proactive step is to get Gardasil™ vaccine. This vaccination series protects against the four most common types of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). 4 The HRC provides the Gardasil™ Patient Assistance Program. Through this program, students who meet specific criteria can be eligible to get the series of injections for free through the HRC.

If students adhere to these suggested flu and STI prevention steps, not only are they safe guarding their own health, but also the health of those around them. There is no better way to spread your love, than to offer the gift of health. Wishing everyone a very happy, loving and healthy February!

Gardasil Vaccine

The Gardasil Vaccine prevents the four most common types of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which cause 90% of genital warts and 70% of cervical cancer. HPV is the most common STI in the U.S., affecting 1 in 2 people.

Gardasil is a series of three injections over a 6-month time period.

The vaccine is now available for both men and women.

You can receive all three shots for free if you qualify! This is a value of over $400! The vaccine manufacturer is offering this program to uninsured, low income females and males, less than 26 years old. Please call (562) 985-2727 or (562) 985-4609 for more information.

References: