

FOCUS ON HEALTH CARE & TECHNOLOGY

Bethlehem's OraSure counts on in-home HIV test

By JOE MCDONALD

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

The annual national HIV testing day on June 27 will have special meaning for a Lehigh Valley-based company in the forefront of a breakthrough technology that allows people to self-test for the virus in the privacy of their home.

OraSure, with headquarters and manufacturing operations in South Bethlehem, won Food and Drug Administration approval last July to sell OraQuick, the first at-home, over-the-counter HIV test using oral fluids.

The kits, which sell for about \$39, began hitting the shelves nationwide last fall in Walmart, CVS, RiteAid and Walgreens. Former basketball legend Magic Johnson, who was diagnosed with the HIV virus two decades ago, is a spokesman for the at-home test.

More than 100,000 kits have been sold since the product was rolled out, a company spokesperson said.

The test detects antibodies for the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, the virus that can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. Users swab the upper or lower gum, place the swab in a vial and wait 20 to 40 minutes for the result to appear in a window.

If the result is positive for HIV, the test kit includes a number for people to call. The call center is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with trained representatives who can advise people on what steps they should take for follow-up care, such as seeing a doctor.

One of the riskier activities that can cause



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

OraSure's at-home test sells for about \$39 and is available nationwide at outlets such as Walmart and CVS.

HIV is unprotected man-to-man sex, medical experts say, and it may take three months before the antibodies are detectable through the test, so follow-up tests are recommended after high-risk sex. Men also can become infected through unprotected sex with a woman who has the virus, and may not even know it.

Everyone who comes in contact with the virus will develop the antibodies at different rates. Ron Ticho, OraSure senior vice president

of corporate communication, said the home self-testing kit can detect HIV "if used three months after a risk event."

If someone tests earlier than three months after risky sex, Ticho said, "they should test again more frequently."

As many as 50,000 new cases occur every year, giving the U.S. an HIV population of

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ORAQUICK

- ▶ **Manufacturer:** OraSure Technologies, Bethlehem.
- ▶ **What:** The first FDA-approved oral swab in-home test for HIV-1 and HIV-2. Unlike earlier tests, which health care professionals have used since 2004, it doesn't require blood.
- ▶ **Cost:** About \$39. It is sold over-the-counter nationwide at Walmart, CVS, RiteAid and Walgreens.

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FOCUS ON HEALTH CARE & TECHNOLOGY

OPINION

LVHN, college pair up to train health care techsBy **JUDITH REX**

Special to Lehigh Valley Business

If you've had your blood drawn, your bladder scanned or your blood sugar monitored at a Lehigh Valley Health Network facility, it is very likely that a technical partner facilitated your care.



Rex

Since 2007, Northampton Community College and LVHN have collaborated to prepare more than 1,000 health care practitioners via

the technical partner trainee program.

What is the technical partner trainee program?

It is a combination of intensive, 128-hour nurse aide training with the addition of another 280 hours of advanced educational preparation.

The skills acquired enable a graduate to begin a career in the field at LVHN. To be such a partner is to be right at the patient's bedside, providing basic care as well as advanced procedures such as electrocardiograms and collecting specimens.

The trainee also learns to recognize and communicate changes in a patient's condition so that registered nurses can promptly intervene. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation-certified through NCC's American Heart Association program, technical partners can step in to initiate early intervention in urgent situations.

"The partnership with NCC puts our trainees into a college setting with resources at their fingertips," said Tiffany Epting, R.N., education

specialist at LVHN. "It allows them to continue their educations.

"Many technical partner trainees, for example, come into the program interested in nursing careers. Many go on to enroll in NCC's nursing program."

The trainees' differences in age, learning styles and prior health care and life experience pose a challenge to instructors.

Long eight-hour days of classroom and clinical instruction make the program time and content intensive for instructors. This is not

In evaluations, 96 percent of students agreed that "simulation cases improve job performance and productivity." This modality helps students build upon their knowledge, confidence level and increase their critical thinking skills.

LVHN employees who are hired for the technical partner role have a choice of two educational tracks: one for the trainee with no prior health care experience and one for those who have had at least six months of recent hospital experience. Students on each track complete a specific num-

For some trainees, the program is a stepping stone to other health care careers such as nursing or physician assistant.

to mention preparation and constant revisions that keep the instructor and trainees abreast of all new procedures and technology.

However, the end result is worth the challenge.

Trainees come from all walks of life – from different work, socioeconomic, cultural and educational backgrounds. They range in age from 18 to 55. Some are seeking new careers or second careers either because of a desire to work in health care or because of loss of employment. Their roles as technical partners will be crucial to patients' outcomes.

In recent years, trainees have augmented their education with simulation. In classes held at the LVHN simulation lab and facilitated by NCC instructors, students gain exposure to real-life situations.

ber of hours based on their experience.

For some trainees, the program is a stepping stone to other health care careers such as nursing or physician assistant. For others, it offers an opportunity to be the sole provider for his or her family.

The trainee becomes an integral part of the health care team with the patient as his or her first priority. They learn to holistically treat the patient utilizing nursing concepts of caring and empathy.

Judith Rex is the director of health care education at Northampton Community College's Center for Business & Industry. For information on training in health care and other occupations, contact the college's Center for Business and Industry at 610-332-8668 or email ddinan@northampton.edu.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Former basketball star Magic Johnson is making appearances to promote OraSure's at-home HIV test.

about 1.2 million. Between 20 and 25 percent are unaware they have the virus, and their actions are responsible for most new infections.

"We're trying to raise the importance about getting tested," Ticho said.

Lehigh Valley Health Network's Dr. Timothy J. Friel, vice chair of research, called the test "another excellent tool for us."

"It's one of the best weapons we have," said Friel, who is medical director at LVHN's 17th Street Campus Department of Medicine. Early detection, he explained, can offer more than just hope but a more meaningful, longer life.

Friel said there was an "epidemic of men having sex with men," but another big change in the disease has been the transmission of it between heterosexual men and women, which he called one of the fastest growing segments.

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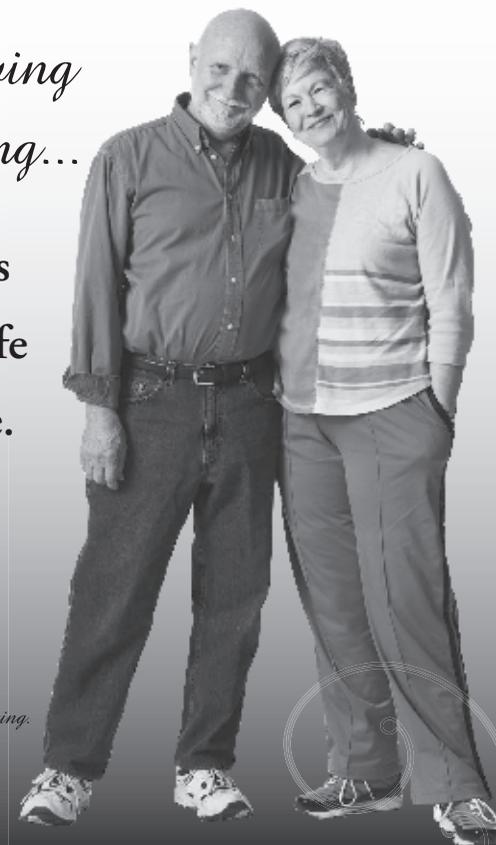
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