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MAYOR MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE *PROJECT HEAL*

Health Emergency Assistance Link Provides Collaborative Services for Victims

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today announced Project HEAL (Health Emergency Assistance Link), a comprehensive plan to improve the services provided to victims of domestic violence at all 11 City hospitals, the first point of entry for many victims seeking help. Project HEAL will enhance the ability of City hospitals to identify victims, document their injuries, and connect them with the social and legal services that they need. Project HEAL will also introduce Safe Horizon staff to three City Hospitals: Jacobi, Elmhurst and Kings County, which are located in communities with high documented incidences of domestic violence. They will assist the hospital Domestic Violence Coordinators in providing follow-up services, such as access to housing, other social services and counsel victims regarding the availability of benefits. Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence Commissioner Yolanda B. Jimenez, Health and Hospitals Corporation President Dr. Benjamin K. Chu, Safe Horizon CEO Gordon Campbell, Dr. Joy Browne, Founder of Dr. Joy to the World Foundation and Senior Vice President of North Bronx Healthcare Network Joseph Orlando joined the Mayor for the announcement at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx.

"Project HEAL represents another step forward in our ongoing commitment to helping the victims of domestic violence," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Many domestic violence victims come to the hospital first – not the police, not the courts – and healthcare providers have an excellent opportunity to provide meaningful assistance to these women. It makes perfect sense that the people who are there to assist them should be well-trained, well-equipped, and well-connected to the critical services that victims need. A strong, effective hospital response may mean the difference between a victim disclosing her abuse, receiving counseling, developing a safety plan, even pursuing charges against her abuser – or continuing to suffer in silence."

Project HEAL will provide City hospital staff with the training and the tools needed to accomplish two main goals: to render the best possible services to domestic violence victims and to accurately document their injuries. The program will include the following specific components:

- The implementation of a new training curriculum will enable hospital staff to more accurately recognize the signs of domestic violence and encourage victims to disclose abuse and accept help.
- High-quality digital cameras will be placed in all City hospital

emergency rooms, providing the means to more accurately document swollen eyes, strangulation marks, light bruises, and other signs of domestic abuse. The new cameras and supporting computer equipment were made possible by a generous donation from Dr. Joy to the World Foundation.

- The use of specially-designed software will simplify the preparation of applications for Family Court Orders of Protection, making it possible for hospital employees and victims to assemble the information necessary to go to court.
- A public awareness campaign in various languages will be launched to assure victims from immigrant populations that City hospitals are a safe place to seek assistance.
- Linkages between hospital staff, community-based organizations and law enforcement will be created to provide coordinated and comprehensive services such as counseling, legal and emergency financial assistance, many of which will be available in the hospital.

Digital technology will greatly enhance the screening process and broaden the ability of staff to determine the history and severity of abuse. All photographs from City hospitals will be stored on one centralized database, giving health care providers ready access to a photographic history of a victim's injuries over time and across different hospitals. With proper victim consent, photographs can be used as evidence in criminal prosecutions.

"Too many victims suffer in silence. Hospitals are a non-threatening point of entry in seeking help for domestic violence, and therefore their role is critical. We encourage anyone experiencing domestic violence to talk to their doctor and to report the incident to the police," said Commissioner Jimenez.

"Healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned to assist victims of domestic violence because they are able to identify and treat injuries of victims reluctant to seek assistance elsewhere," said Dr. Chu. "They will be able to find a safe haven at the City's hospitals and a trusted resource among the experienced Domestic Violence Coordinators at our hospitals."

"Domestic violence is an important public health issue," said Commissioner Frieden. "Emergency departments are a critical point of contact in identifying and providing supportive services for victims of domestic violence. Thanks to programs such as Project HEAL, the City will be able to enhance its capacity to accurately document those who suffer from domestic abuse, and connect them with appropriate services."

"Having been trained as a scientist, I know the importance of evidence in documenting and building a case," said Dr. Browne. "I am proud that my foundation is able to help people who have been hurt by loved ones by documenting, in a dramatic and powerful way, the nature and extent of that hurt."

In November 2002, the City also implemented the Domestic Violence Response Teams Pilot Program (DVRT) in two communities sharing the highest rates of domestic abuse recorded in the City, namely East Flatbush in Brooklyn and Soundview in the Bronx. Through the DVRT program, high-risk victims obtain enhanced social services including housing placement and counseling. Only one victim has suffered subsequent physical injury out of the 40 high-risk victims identified by DVRT Teams since the inception of the program.

Nationwide, approximately one-third of all women treated at hospital

emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were hurt by an intimate partner. At the same time, women are often reluctant to report domestic abuse to the police. Nationwide, only about 25% of domestic physical assault victims make police reports, and in New York City, 65% of last year's domestic violence homicide victims had no prior contact with the police. For the first quarter of this year ending April 30, 2003 compared to the first quarter of 2002, domestic violence related homicide, rape and felony assaults are down 7% Citywide.

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