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## HIV support group meets at The Center

By Phillip Zonkel Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH - The Center Long Beach is hosting a support group for people who have been diagnosed HIV positive in the past two years.

The meetings are held 6:30 p.m. every Tuesday at the Center, 2017 E. Fourth St.

Dealing with a new HIV diagnosis can be a challenging and, at times, overwhelming experience, said Michael Buitron, outreach specialist with the C.A.R.E. (Comprehensive AIDS Resource Education) Program at St. Mary Medical Center and the support group's facilitator.

"It's still really, really tough for a lot of people," Buitron said. "There's so much stuff to negotiate when you're HIV positive, from finding an HIV-friendly doctor to dealing with the stigma some people have about dating someone who's positive."

Buitron leads the support group with three discussion topics: disclosure, dating and safer sex; managing medical care, understanding lab work and treatment options; and dealing with family, work and friends.

The Center also has expanded its HIV testing hours to 2-9 p.m. Monday through Friday and, starting Saturday, noon-3 p.m.

The testing takes 20 to 40 minutes, depending on individual counseling sessions and the number of clients being tested.

Anonymous and confidential testing are available.

Anyone who tests positive for HIV at the Center is referred to the C.A.R.E. Program for medical care, case management and mental health support, Morales says.

The Center began HIV testing in January 2010 for the first time since 2005, thanks to a grant from the Los Angeles County Health Department.

The \$393,000 grant, from the department's Office of AIDS Programs and Policy, funds the center's new rapid HIV testing program for 2<MD+,%30,%55,%70>1/<MD-,%0,%55,%70>2 years.

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For more information about the HIV-positive support group, contact Michael Buitron at 562-624-4977 or michael

[.buitron@chw.edu](mailto:michael.buitron@chw.edu).

To schedule an HIV test, contact The Center Long Beach, 562-434-4455, Ext. 238.

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