Putting patient safety first

Through advocating for safe injection practices, HONOReform seeks to participate in ongoing efforts to restore public confidence to the medical community.

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The 2008 outbreak of hepatitis C in Nevada, during which more than 60,000 patients in the Las Vegas area were placed in harm’s way while receiving routine healthcare, is a public health breakdown and crisis that is well documented in Nevada and beyond. Because syringes and single-dose medication vials were reused on multiple patients, up to 115 Nevadans, who were undergoing colon screening in outpatient clinics, became infected with hepatitis C. One of these patients recently died. Epidemiologists make clear that the cause of his death is complications from viral hepatitis.

There are substantial financial costs associated with this outbreak. A University of Nevada at Las Vegas study estimates that the amount spent to test patients for hepatitis C is $20–25 million. Reportage of extended court cases, resulting in significant settlements, remains prominent in area and national media. Individual patients who have become infected with this potentially deadly disease have unexpected costs, for medical and other needs. Clearly, citizens, taxpayers and patients in Nevada and beyond bear the financial burden of this devastating outbreak.

HONOReform FOUNDATION
Formed in 2007, Hepatitis Outbreaks’ National Organization for Reform (HONOReform) Foundation, based in Fremont, Nebraska, aims to help safeguard the medical injection process as a way to prevent outbreaks of bloodborne pathogens. The organization is led by Evelyn McKnight, survivor of the 2001 Nebraska outbreak, during which 99 Nebraskans were infected with hepatitis C. She is co-author of A Never Event: Exposing the Largest Outbreak of Hepatitis C in American Healthcare History, a chronicle of this outbreak. HONOReform is active on Capitol Hill and at the state level. In tandem with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its many partners on the Safe Injection Practices Coalition, HONOReform helps provide the One and Only Campaign (OneandOnlyCampaign.org) to providers and patients throughout the United States.

HONOReform’s RESPONSE IN NEVADA
Representatives of the Southern Nevada Health District called on Evelyn McKnight to address the crowd at the first public forum in Las Vegas in 2008. An active presenter and advocate, McKnight is considered the patient voice for elimination of outbreaks in healthcare settings. Following that public meeting, McKnight was invited by the Nevada State Medical Association (NSMA) to participate in a discussion about the issue. The NSMA adopted strongly supportive policies to encourage an information campaign to address unsafe injection practices and participated with HONOReform, the CDC Foundation and other stakeholders in developing the national Safe Injection Practices Campaign. From the first meeting with patients and concerned citizens, McKnight and HONOReform have been active throughout Nevada, serving on committees and working alongside a variety of organizations. HONOReform added three Nevadans to its board of directors in 2011.

The goal of HONOR Campaign Nevada is restoration of confidence to the medical community and to patients. In our ongoing assessment...
of the Nevada healthcare infrastructure since the announcement of the outbreak, we have determined three areas of significant improvement:

Scrutiny: Close scrutiny of the outbreak and its aftermath—and of additional, unrelated patient safety incidents—has helped compel interest, in providers and patients, and in infection prevention.

Legislation: The Nevada State Legislature passed several landmark bills, signed into law by the Governor in the 2009 session. Included in this suite of laws is mandatory yearly inspection of outpatient clinics (twice/year in colon screening clinics). In the 2011 session, HONOReform helped introduce its HONOR Campaign Nevada as part of the July 2012 Nevada State Health Division Infection Prevention Conference.

Desire: Through its HONOR Campaign Nevada committee, HONOReform has become aware that providers throughout Nevada express commitment to safe injection practices and the desire to always provide safe injections to their patients.

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THE MEMBERS
Led by current members, including the Nevada State Medical Association, the Clark County Medical Society, and the University of Nevada Las Vegas School of Community Health Sciences, the HONOR Campaign Nevada committee is currently calling on all members of the area healthcare community and others, asking them to help support our patient safety efforts. A variety of outpatient clinics are also engaged in our work. During the first phase of our work, the committee will provide access to the One and Only Campaign materials (“One Needle, One Syringe, Only One Time”), a provider toolkit titled “Injection Safety: Every Provider’s Responsibility,” a signed “We Promise” (to provide safe injections) poster for the clinic lobby, and other helpful materials. Visit www.HONOReform.org to learn more.

MOVING FORWARD
While the 2008 outbreak has, justly, been documented in the ongoing conversation on breakdowns in public health, the HONOR Campaign Nevada seeks to highlight the transformation that is occurring throughout Nevada. Greater scrutiny, legislation, oversight and desire have become apparent, and the HONOR Campaign Nevada aims to fully restore confidence in the area’s healthcare.

Promoting adherence to injection safety: A brief history
Starting from the announcement of the 2008 Nevada outbreak, leadership of the Nevada State Medical Association (NSMA) and the Clark County Medical Society (CCMS), among others, have been active participants in promoting adherence to injection safety. In a way, HONOReform Campaign Nevada: putting patient safety first is a continuation of these early efforts. Notable achievements include commitment by leadership of Nevada’s medical associations to the early work on the One and Only Campaign (OneandOnlyCampaign.org). At the 2008 NSMA annual meeting, members provided feedback on the early materials that were presented. Evelyn McKnight attended this meeting through telephone conference. The CDC and its partners launched the One and Only Campaign just months after NSMA meeting.

Leading up to the 2009 legislative session, NSMA leadership worked with the Nevada Legislative Committee on Health Care on the most comprehensive package of legislation on safe injection practices passed in any state. Included in this suite of bills is mandatory yearly inspection of ambulatory surgery centers—and biannual inspections of outpatient facilities that provide colonoscopies. In our discussions with the state infection preventionists and others, we believe they are committed to doing thorough, timely inspections in these facilities.

In the 2011 legislative session, the Nevada Legislature passed the “attestation law,” which requires healthcare workers who provide injections to adhere to following CDC standards on safe injection practices. Starting in October 2011, healthcare workers have had the attestation law included in their licensing.