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DPS Health & UCLA Launch Text Messaging for Health Program in South Africa

Research project will discover if text messaging among low income women with diabetes will improve ability to manage their health.

(Los Angeles, CA) April 16, 2010 – DPS Health announces the launch of a joint initiative with the University of California, Los Angeles and Women for Peace, South Africa that will study the effectiveness of a text messaging support intervention with low-income South African women living with diabetes. The research is designed to determine if regular support from a peer (who also has diabetes) using text messaging can provide simple and affordable approaches of peer-to-peer social support, and offer effective educational and motivational messages.

DPS Health, building upon its propriety behavior change technology platform called *Behavior Change Suite™*, developed the software to power peer-to-peer support interventions through Short Message Service (SMS) with access from regular mobile phones (i.e., Smartphone not required). This approach promotes behavior change through both individual interaction and activating the peer supporter. Individuals receive condition specific questions, messages and prompts texted to their phone and are encouraged to communicate via text with their peer in response to the questions. This approach can also be used to measure outcomes from a variety of interventions by collecting patient reported health status and symptoms. It is expected that this approach will be able to: 1) increase peer-to-peer support leading to decreased feelings of social isolation, increased self-efficacy and improved outcomes; 2) increase patients' ability to manage their own health and disease(s); and 3) provide effective engagement by individuals with limited Internet access or skills.

Supported by the Peers for Progress Program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation, the UCLA Global Center for Children and Families is piloting this novel text messaging application to engage low-income women with diabetes in South Africa. Three teams are collaborating with DPS on the design, implementation, and evaluation: UCLA led by Mary Jane Rotheram-Borus; South African Women for Peace agency coordinated by Executive Director, Margaret Gwesgwe and Marion Keim at the University of the Western Cape; and Mark Tomlinson at Stellenbosch University.

In addition to 12 weekly small group, psycho-educational meetings, social support and monitoring on the mobile phone is a key aspect of the program. Women with diabetes are probed daily on their diabetes self-management, with women answering daily questions about their health and habits through text messaging at random times. In addition, women are paired with a buddy to support healthy lifestyle changes. Women's responses are routed through a centralized server and then passed as a text message to buddy pairs and to the clinical host for data analysis.

According to Dr. Rotherum-Boris, "This study will provide critical information about how to create sustainable and affordable approaches that improve the lives of those with diabetes and other chronic diseases. UCLA is excited about this opportunity to partner with DPS Health." Neal Kaufman, M.D., M.P.H., co-founder and CEO of DPS Health and UCLA Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health, presented this new program at the 2010 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Diabetes Translation Conference on April 15, 2010 in Kansas City, Missouri. Final results from the study will be available later in 2010.

About DPS Health

DPS Health, founded in 2004 creates software solutions using an innovative, flexible and scalable technological platform (Behavior Change Suite™) that implement research-proven best practices of self-management support. In one example, DPS Health worked with faculty from the University of Pittsburgh to develop the web-based Virtual Lifestyle Management (VLM) service based upon the NIH-funded Diabetes Prevention Program (also developed by the University of Pittsburgh). Other examples of interventions built on the BCS platform include the Physical Activity Data Warehouse™, and the Lifecorder Online™ web applications with the Suzuken Company. Additionally, DPS Health has developed an SMS peer-to-peer support application that utilizes text messages on regular mobile phones.

About UCLA Center for Children and Families

Since 1994, the Center has been mounting community trials for families at high risk for a range of negative outcomes. With more than 15 evidence-based interventions for families, the Center is leading in utilizing new technologies and good clinical practices to improve the quality of care, especially by community health workers in China, Thailand, Vietnam, AU, Uganda, South Africa, and Mexico.

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