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July 28, 2009

NEWS RELEASE

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Corrections Department and UNM Train Inmates in Hepatitis C Prevention and Care

Santa Fe - The New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) and the University of New Mexico Project ECHO are embarking on a new program that teaches inmates how to educate other inmates about the Hepatitis C virus. Currently, 38 percent of New Mexico Corrections Department inmates are living with the virus. As of June 2009, there were more than 2,400 confirmed cases in NMCD prisons.

The purpose of the training is to prevent transmission of Hepatitis C and other infectious diseases among inmates. Hepatitis C is recognized as a major public health issue in New Mexico. Injection drug use, and in-prison tattoos are implicated as the primary routes of transmission when the equipment used to tattoo or inject drugs is shared.

This week, 10 male prisoners will receive 32-hour training in Hepatitis C, other infectious diseases and health literacy. The training is taking place at the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility in Los Lunas, New Mexico. The training, provided by Project ECHO staff, is designed to teach prisoners how to be health educators to their peers inside prison. The trainees will learn about Hepatitis C prevention, transmission, and treatment specific to the prison environment. The training will also focus on other infectious diseases and broader physical, mental, and emotional health. Another goal of the project is to give inmate trainees the tools to be community health educators after their release from prison.

Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a new and innovative model in treating complex chronic diseases in rural and underserved areas of New Mexico. Via technology, ECHO bridges the gap between urban healthcare specialists and providers in rural settings. Staff from Project ECHO have been partnering with the New Mexico Corrections Department and other agencies since 2003 to advance the treatment for Hepatitis C patients.