

# UNC advances AIDS research



DTHFILE/ERIN HULL  
Dr. Myron Cohen's study has been hailed as strong evidence for the importance of antiretroviral treatment in halting the spread of AIDS.

By Andy Thomason  
Summer Editor

The University's top AIDS researchers had a very productive summer.

A study released in May and led by Dr. Myron Cohen, director of the UNC Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases, has been hailed as a landmark finding with heavy implications for slowing the global spread of AIDS.

Meanwhile, a team of UNC researchers in July received a five-year, \$32 million federal grant aimed at eradicating the disease.

The developments are representative of the University's prominence in the AIDS research community, as well as the transition of emphasis in the field from prevention to finding a cure for the virus.

"A year ago, somebody would have been embarrassed to say the word 'cure' in public," said Dr. David Margolis, a professor in the medical school and leader of the \$32 million project. "Now, things are different."

Cohen's study has demonstrated the importance of early drug treatment to inhibit the transmission of HIV.

The study featured a 96 percent success rate in inhibiting the spread of infection from partner to partner — a number that caught the attention of national and international news outlets as well as other researchers.

"We've had a couple of trials that have been deemed successful with efficacy levels less than 50 percent," said Ronald Swanstrom, director of the UNC Center for AIDS Research.

Dr. Angela Kashuba, an associate professor in the Eshelman School of Pharmacy who is heavily involved in AIDS research, said the study's success rate has not yet been seen in studies of its type.

"This is really an intervention that has demonstrated the greatest amount of efficacy in HIV prevention,"

Cohen said he will continue working to advance the field of AIDS prevention.

"OK, it was 96 percent effective," he said. "I need to understand why one patient got HIV. I need to get a drug combination that's 100 percent effective."

The project that received the grant in July involves three UNC researchers — Margolis, Kashuba and Victor Garcia-Martinez. Its aim is to explore eradication through suppressing the virus by antiretroviral medication, then flushing it out with drug therapy.

Combined with this view in the project is that of Garcia-Martinez, whose method of humanizing mice resides on the cutting edge of eradication research.

In this method, mice are biologically altered so they can be infected with the virus.

Eradication efforts can then be tested more quickly, and with greater freedom in the level of drug toxicity. "We'll probably cure a mouse in the next couple of years," Margolis said.

The project's prominence is a testament to UNC's strong research staff, said Kashuba.

"This is a highly collaborative, highly multidisciplinary effort that is very unique to UNC," she said.

# County budget focuses on safety

By Chelsey Dulaney  
Senior Writer

For years, the time it takes for county ambulances to respond to emergency calls has lagged behind local officials' goals.

But with public safety representing a major priority in the \$178.2 million county budget for the 2011-12 fiscal year, Orange County Emergency Services will soon be equipped with new resources to help it better serve county residents in need.

The budget, which was approved June 21, will also maintain education funding amidst state cuts and avoid laying off county employees — commitments County Manager Frank Clifton said could mean paying higher property taxes in coming years.

## A better response time

On May 17, Clifton proposed a budget that will fund six new emergency medical technicians, two new ambulances and four new telecommunicators.

Capt. Kim Woodward, operations manager for the county's EMS, said the additional staff could help reduce response time and increase the number of emergency units available to county residents.

The average ambulance response time in Orange County is 17 minutes. Woodward said the department hopes to bridge the gap between its current time and the 12-minute norm.

"We probably won't reach our goal this year, but it gets us moving towards that goal," she said.

Reducing the ambulance response time to emergency calls can increase the survival chance of the patient, Woodward said.

In addition, quick response times have benefits like removing pressure from partner agencies who also respond to emergencies and opening up more units to respond to calls, she said.

## Delayed priorities

While emergency services will receive increased funding, other

## BUDGET BREAKDOWN

**\$178.2 million**  
General fund for 2011-12

**10**  
EMS positions created

**85.8 cents**  
Property tax per \$100 of value

**\$19.7 million**  
Money allotted to public safety

large-scale issues, like the county's shortage of jail space, will be put on hold in the coming year.

Clifton said the Orange County Jail does not have enough beds for its prisoners.

The county is waiting for the state legislature to decide whether the state will stop housing people arrested on misdemeanor charges. They would instead be sent back to their home counties, further pressing Orange County's already limited jail space options, said County Commissioner Barry Jacobs.

"There's no real plan for addressing (the space shortage) and I think that's a deficiency, regardless of what the state does," he said.

Clarence Grier, financial services director for the county, said the proposed general fund budget will not call for an increase in the county's already high property tax rate.

Clifton warned commissioners at their May 17 meeting that an increase in the property tax rate is likely in upcoming years to alleviate the problem of jail space shortage, as well as to fund upcoming capital projects such as the Efland Sewer Project and the Buckhorn water and sewer expansion.

The budget will also provide \$83.5 million — about 47 percent of the county's general fund budget — in education funding but decrease funding for non-profits.

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