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THE HIGH COST OF VALLEY FEVER TO ARIZONA'S WORKFORCE

TUCSON, AZ – Arizona employers and employees pay the price for a regional disease with a potential cure.

The effects of Valley Fever can be physically and financially devastating for the patient and his/her employer. The majority of Arizona employees work for a small business or are self employed. (Source: U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, October 2009). Seventy-six percent (76%) of Valley Fever patients missed an average 32 days of work due to the disease according to the 2007 Arizona Department of Health Services study. Not only do employers and employees miss work for sick days and doctors appointments, but the illness contributes to emergency room visits and health insurance claims.

WHAT IS VALLEY FEVER?

Valley Fever (coccidioidomycosis), which is a lives in Arizona's soil and can be inhaled when dust is disturbed through winds, construction and outdoor activities, infects approximately 150,000 people in the United States each year. Over two-thirds of the infections occur in Arizona, primarily Pima, Pinal and Maricopa counties. This area is known as the "Valley Fever Corridor".

The peak seasons for Valley Fever infections are June through August and October through December. Valley Fever cases have been on the increase. Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Infectious Disease Services recently reported in 82% increase in cases between April and May 2010. Valley Fever infects people and pets as well. The disease attacks both species the same way and uses the same drugs in treatment.

THE COSTS

76% missed an average of 32 work days due to Valley Fever

Average of 2.8 visits to a healthcare provider before Valley Fever test was ordered

44% of Valley Fever patients went to the emergency room

40% were hospitalized overnight with Valley Fever

\$86 million was spent on treatment for Valley Fever (an average of \$50,000 per patient) in Arizona in 2007

(Source, http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/epi/pdf/VF_Annual_Report_2007.pdf)

PETS AND THE EMPLOYEE

Valley Fever is very common in pets, especially in the Valley Fever Corridor. One out of 25 dogs in this area will be sick with Valley Fever each year. Employees will miss work to take their pets to veterinarian appointments and stay home with sick pets. Petplan, a pet insurance provider, conducted a survey and found that “35% of people admitted to taking time off work to either settle new pets into the home or care for sick pets, and half of those admitted to taking the whole week off.”

According to the 2007 Arizona Department of Health study, \$6,000,000 is spent annually treating dogs with Valley Fever. Less than 1% of the pets in the US are insured (Petside.com, January 28, 2009), that leaves pet owners to pay 100% of the medication, bloodwork, X-rays and related treatment costs. On-line pet support groups like Yahoo’s Valley Fever Pet Support Newsgroup are filled with exchanges about the best places to purchase Fluconazole, the most common treatment today.

POSSIBLE CURE

Nikkomycin Z, a drug created in the 1970’s, has shown great promise as a cure for Valley Fever. Five years ago the Valley Fever Center for Excellence (VFCE) at the University of Arizona College of Medicine acquired the rights to develop the drug. A recent \$3 million National Institute of Health Small Business Grant was awarded to a U of A spin-off company (Valley Fever Solutions Inc.) to support manufacturing and continued human testing. “This new grant from the NIH is a real shot in the arm for the NikZ project,” said John Galgiani, MD, director of the Valley Fever Center for Excellence and Chief Medical Officer for Valley Fever Solutions. “Not only will we now be able to continue the drug’s development but funds came from a very competitive scientific review – it’s a ‘pat on the back’ to our approach.”

The \$3 million is a start for Tucson clinical trials, but another \$2 million to \$3 million would be needed to extend the trials in Phoenix. A recent *Arizona Republic* editorial (May 24, 2010) has come out in support of the Center (VFCE) and is calling for all Arizonans to take action and get involved to find a cure. Because of the regional impact of the disease, it gets little attention from the pharmaceutical industry. Dr. John Galgiani, MD says “Simply put if it’s an orphan disease, there aren’t many people that need the therapy if you look at pharmaceutical business models and so it’s been very hard to get a pharmaceutical company interested enough to get it through the FDA process.”

The FDA defines Orphan Disease as an illness that impacts 200,000 people at any one time. With 150,000 people infected in the United States annually, the disease falls into that category. With 60% of the reported cases in Arizona, the illness is now being dubbed as “Arizona’s Disease”.

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THE VALLEY FEVER CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

The Valley Fever Center for Excellence at the University of Arizona promotes research, education and improved patient care. It is the only academic research institution in the world focused on this disease. Currently the VFCE is conducting clinical trials on a new Valley Fever medication, nikkomycin Z. www.vfce.arizona.edu.

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For the complete Arizona Department of Health Service's Report, refer to

http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/epi/pdf/VF_Annual_Report_2007.pdf

VALLEY FEVER ALLIANCE

The Valley Fever Alliance is an all volunteer organization committed to raising funds and public awareness to support the work of the **Valley Fever Center for Excellence (VFCE)** at the University of Arizona, Tucson. The VFA will hold two Walk for a Cure events this fall. The Tucson Event will be held at the University of Arizona Mall on October 10, 2010 and the Phoenix Event will be held on November 7, 2010 at 550 Van Buren near the College of Medicine at the University of Arizona.

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ADDITIONAL STORY IDEAS – NEWS RELEASES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON MINORITY POPULATIONS

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON PREGNANT WOMEN

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON AIDS PATIENTS

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON ARIZONA'S ECONOMY

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON COMPANION ANIMALS

IMPACT OF VALLEY FEVER ON ZOO ANIMALS