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A Program to Reduce the Use of Pesticide Products for the Treatment of Head Lice in Children

It was in the spring of 2003 when the nursing staff at the Marion County Health Department attended a local training held by a Family & Children First Council representative. The topic of discussion was our local grant-funded Lice Buster Program which was being flooded with referrals. Every agency that worked with or on the behalf of children was there to be trained.

Simple instruction and proper treatment guidelines needed to be established, followed, and shared among public health representatives in Marion County. The treatment product of choice by "The Lice Lady" was De Bug lice shampoo. We had never heard of this product, and had just assumed that we would recommend whatever was available at the local drug store. There were many reasons that De Bug was to be our treatment of choice:

- ✓ It is pesticide-free. We don't know with absolute certainty (because the studies haven't been done), the harm that pesticides applied to the scalp may cause to children. But, who wants to risk the health of a child? - Especially if there is an alternative treatment!
- ✓ Pesticides may or may not get rid of lice, because lice are building immunity to pesticides - we can reduce this effect by using non-toxic pesticide-free treatments!
- ✓ De Bug is an enzyme-based product - it is completely safe for you, your children, your home, your furniture, your pets, etc... There is no need to bomb your entire household!

Unfortunately, Marion County's Lice Buster Program ran out of grant funding in the fall of 2003. We felt a responsibility to take on this huge task of educating the public about the potential dangers of pesticide use on children. ***We decided to order De-Bug, and to make it available to the public at an affordable cost.***

To begin our campaign, the Health Educator visited every office of every Pediatrician and Family Practitioner, posting fliers in each patient exam room and educating the physician's staff members.

The next visit was to every pharmacy in the county, delivering fliers and speaking with the pharmacists about the dangers of pesticides.

Because we have health nurses in the local schools, all we needed to do was send hand-out materials and information with them as they performed the annual head lice checks. We now send DeBug to the local schools during lice head checks. Parents of children who fail the head check can buy it when they pick up their child.

Last but not least, we posted a column in the local newspaper that discussed head lice as both a nuisance and the potential health threat associated with pesticide use. This caused quite a bit of commotion in the community, and the newspaper published the National Pediculosis Associations no-nits policy for schools.

This definitely got us the attention we were after, and soon the De Bug lice shampoo started flying off the shelf! We asked people where they heard about this product, and the referrals came from everywhere -doctors, pharmacists, school teachers and nurses, friends, neighbors, the local newspaper and other agencies!

Our plan has been a success! Since beginning the project in August of 2003, we have sold 729 bottles of DeBug Shampoo kits (product, lice comb, & detailed instructions) which is equal to between 8,000 & 10,000 safe treatments for head lice!

The word is most definitely out in our community! ***We follow up each fall with all of our contacts,*** to deliver new posters and make sure the information being disseminated is accurate.

When parents come to us, upset and angry, we quickly calm their fears and tell them that we have a safe, effective treatment that will help them to safely control this problem. We provide direction and advice, and offer additional guidance if they need it.

With the help of De Bug lice shampoo and now lice oil, for easier removal of nits, we feel that we have the best solution to safely and economically manage the head lice problem in our county.