

Irish descendants at high risk for liver disease

By John Hejkal

Staff writer

As St. Patrick's Day draws near, Irish blood may be a cause for pride in many people.

But Irish livers may be a cause for problems.

Those of Celtic origin are at a particularly high risk for hereditary hemochromatosis, or HH, said Sandra Thomas, founder and president of the American Hemochromatosis Society in Delray Beach, Fla. She has dubbed the disease the Celtic Curse.

HH is a gene mutation that causes the body to store abnormally high levels of iron. Iron gets stored mostly in the liver, pancreas or pituitary gland in the brain. If too much iron accumulates, these organs can become damaged.

Dr. Mark Hutchins of the Nebraska Hematology-Oncology center in Lincoln said HH usually won't be detected until the disease manifests itself in noticeable damage to the body.

Thomas, whose mother died from liver cancer caused by HH in 1999, said the key to making sure people didn't suffer from the disease was getting the word out to the nearly 32 million people who could be at risk.

"People say, 'How can this be so prevalent, and I've never heard about it?'" she said. "Well, that's what we want to know and what we're trying to change."

If found early, HH is treated easily,

"When you absorb iron into your system, it's there until you bleed."

Mark Hutchins

doctor of hematology and oncology

but if left undetected, liver cancer or heart failure could be the eventual result, Hutchins said.

"Iron is one of the metals in the body that we don't have a normal way of excreting," Hutchins said. "When you absorb iron into your system, it's there until you bleed."

The normal treatment for HH is regular blood-letting. The bleeding is done just like a donation to the blood bank, Thomas said.

"Diet is not the way to manage hemochromatosis," she said. "Usually it's the blood-letting. That's the treatment for this disease."

The blood-letting creates a deficit of blood in the body. People with HH can draw iron out of the large stores in their bodies to make more blood.

Blood from people with HH is acceptable for donation to blood banks, Thomas said, so increasing awareness about HH could have dual benefits.

"That would be a great way to end the blood shortage in this country, if we could diagnose the patients and get them to donate the blood," she said.

Researchers believe Celtic people formed the HH mutation in their genes as long as 40,000 years ago in the area

that is modern-day Ireland, Thomas said.

The diet of the people may have been low in iron because of famine conditions at the time. To compensate, people developed this way to store as much iron as possible in their bodies.

Irish people are not the only ones who may inherit the disease. Those of French, Scandinavian or German descent also are at high risk.

"I know the Celtic curse sounds a little ominous," Thomas said. "But diagnosed early, this disease is curable. Diagnosed late, it's deadly."

Hutchins said people usually don't notice problems from HH until age 40 or 50, but he recommended testing between the ages of 20 and 30 for people with family histories of liver damage or heart failure.

HH rarely causes problems in young women, he said, because menstruation gives iron a ready place to go as women replace the lost blood.

Thomas said the HH mutation is easily detectable with a simple lab test.

Those who want more information should call the American Hemochromatosis Society at 1-888-655-IRON.

Stolen credit card used at mall

■ Freshman's purse stolen from Temple Building on Tuesday during class.

By Michelle Starr

Staff writer

A spring break trip to Cancun, Mexico, may have been the motivation behind a Tuesday spending spree with a stolen credit card.

University Police Sgt. Mylo Bushing said a woman using a stolen credit card told clerks at five stores that she was making the purchases for a trip to Cancun.

The woman spent about \$100 each at Lerner New York, Maurices, Victoria's Secret and Gadzooks and \$35 at The Market; all of the stores are in Gateway Mall, 61st and O

streets.

The credit card owner, Jessica Hutchinson, a freshman theater major, said her purse with her wallet were stolen from the Temple Building on UNL's City Campus.

Hutchinson had been in class Tuesday when she and the rest of the class went to the scene shop for about 10 minutes, and everyone left their belongings unattended, she said.

When she came back her purse was gone, she said.

Not only did she lose money and the ability to get more money from her bank, but she lost many sentimental items, she said.

Among the things in her purse were other credit cards, bank cards and a social security card. But she was concerned mostly about ticket stubs from New York Broadway shows and the purse itself, which is

from New York, Hutchinson said.

"I've never been so angry and completely violated in my life," Hutchinson said. "Everything that means nothing to her and so much to me she's probably already tossed."

Hutchinson said she was disappointed that someone would steal from the Temple Building because it's like a second home for theater students.

Recently, Steve Barth, a senior theater major, also had his wallet stolen from the Temple Building, and his credit cards had been used, Hutchinson said.

Barth was unavailable for comment.

Bushing said anyone with information about the crime involving a white woman in her 20s making purchases for a spring break trip should contact authorities.

Free disorder screening to be held in Lincoln

By Tony Moses

Staff writer

Two groups are looking to increase public awareness on behavioral disorders by holding screenings today and Saturday.

The Lincoln Behavioral Health Clinic and Behavioral Health Counseling Center, a division of the clinic, are sponsoring free screenings for depression, anxiety, alcohol problems and eating disorders.

"It's not for diagnosis or treatment; it's for awareness," said Scott Walls, director for the Behavioral Health Counseling Center.

The screening is offered today from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Doane College's Lincoln campus, at 303 N. 52nd St.

Each person's visit at the screening will begin with a one-page briefing to draw awareness to any potential problems, Walls said.

Staff members from the Behavioral Health Counseling Center will be available to discuss the results of the briefings with participants.

In addition to the briefing, informational videos and referrals will be available.

Dr. Bob Portnoy, clinical psychologist and director of UNL Counseling and Psychological Services, said depression and anxiety are the two most common problems seen by the staff.

"The effects can be very dramatic," he said. "We find people unable to function with clinical depression."

Portnoy said anxiety levels can be also problematic. He also said some students may avoid classes intentionally or change their majors because of high anxiety levels.

"You want an individual to have enough anxiety to focus but not enough to be overwhelmed," Portnoy said.

Two honor societies select new members

By Gwen Tietgen

Staff writer

Being tackled and tapped by a bunch of students wearing red and black robes with sunglasses or masks over their eyes doesn't seem like an ordinary honor society tradition.

That's because it isn't.

Mortar Board is a national senior honorary while Innocents Society, the chancellor's senior honorary, is unique to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Mortar Board tapped and Innocents tackled their new members Monday.

The 23 new members of the Black Masque Chapter of Mortar Board and 13 new members of Innocents Society will be initiated April 1 and inducted April 8 at Ivy Day.

From the time she was a freshman, Beth Augustine, who was chosen for Innocents, said she looked up to the students in Innocents Society and Mortar Board.

"As a freshman in (the Chancellor's Leadership Class), we learn about (those societies)," Augustine said. "I always thought I'd like to be that type of person."

Augustine said she didn't know what to expect Monday. She didn't know if she would be selected for membership, she said.

"It's so competitive," she said. "You hope that you'll make it, but at the same time you don't know. It was a very great surprise."

Juan Izaguirre, a senior social sciences education major and new member of Mortar Board, said he didn't expect to get tapped.

"I was shocked because they tapped me at work, and I thought they were going to tap someone else," Izaguirre said.

"I heard about it my freshman year, but it was Cynthia Gooch who really pushed me to apply. Everything is still sinking in."

Gooch is the assistant director of multicultural recruitment.

Jill Braband, a current member of Innocents Society, said the society does various service activities on campus, in the community and

"Innocents doesn't seek recognition for what they do but seek to better the university."

Jill Braband

Innocents Society member

for philanthropies.

"Innocents doesn't seek recognition for what they do but seek to better the university," Braband said.

"We conceal our identities because we work as a group and don't seek individual recognition."

Sara Miley, junior exercise science major and new Mortar Board member, said it is an honor but also a commitment to serve campus.

"I want to continue the tradition that the Black Masque Chapter has set."

Brett Stohs, a junior math and political science major, said he was elated when he saw the red robes of Innocents members coming for him.

"I see Innocents like a person who puts a quarter in your parking meter after it has expired without you knowing it," Stohs said.

Being a part of Innocents is something he has always had in the back of his mind, Stohs said.

"It's a great honor knowing I am one of the 13 people who has given lots of time and effort to the betterment of campus and the community," Stohs said.

Natalya Shannon, a junior biology and psychology major, said being inducted into Innocents was an amazing experience.

"First of all, this is a really great tradition and a real historical part of the university," Shannon said.

"I'm very proud and very honored to represent the superior ideals of the University of Nebraska."

Staff writer Veronica Daehn contributed to this report.

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