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# What hairdressers know

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Published Monday, Nov. 18, 2011 9:00AM EST

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Just over 100 years ago, a little-known chemist, Eugène Schuller, rode his bicycle through the streets of Paris, stopping at every hair salon to drop off a brand new product. Trouble was, no one understood how this strange liquid, called Auréale or hair dye, worked. So he taught the owners how to use it, and formed the L'Oréal template for training hairdressers. (The original name of the company, translated as "Safe Hair Dye Company of France," did not last.)

True to its roots, L'Oréal Canada still gives in-salon instruction to hairdressers, and formal instruction to future hairdressers through its academy in Toronto and a new studio in Montreal.

The training links students to a partnership between the L'Oréal Foundation and UNESCO, called Hairdressers Against AIDS, founded by Cristina Owen-Jones, wife of former L'Oréal CEO Lindsay Owen-Jones, after a trip to South Africa that revealed the harsh reality and lack of knowledge about HIV-AIDS.

"Each time we have a class with students, whether it's in-salon or in our academies, we always start by speaking about AIDS," says Mikael Henry, senior vice-president of the professional products division in Canada.



Hairdressers are encouraged to discuss the topic openly with customers. Future hairdressers are shown an educational video and given a 14-question quiz and a reality check. For example, it is safe for hairdressers to cut hair for customers with HIV; the disease cannot be contracted through saliva; and, as one customer learned, mothers with HIV can give birth to a healthy child with the right treatment.

“Trained hairdressers have a key role in raising public awareness of the pandemic and are actively involved against AIDS,” the organization Hairdressers Against AIDS says on its website.

UNESCO is on board because the program is about education, says Mr. Henry. Hairdressers are in contact with 95 per cent of the Canadian public, which provides a powerful opportunity to raise awareness about HIV-AIDs, he says. Many customers spend one to two hours in the salon per appointment and some develop an intimate bond with their hairdresser. It’s natural to talk, he says.

On World AIDs Day, December 1, Hairdressers Against AIDS puts an extra focus on awareness in salons across the country and around the globe.

“We ask hairdressers to dress with a simple t-shirt with our logo: ‘Hairdressers Against AIDS’ or ‘Let’s talk together.’ And we give a quiz to the customers,” says Mr. Henry.

Hairdressers Against AIDS also seeks to use the power of the Internet to raise awareness. The quiz and related video can be found on the group’s website at <http://www.hairdressersagainstaids.com/en/>. A Facebook group has over 10,000 members.