CENTER NEWS

A publication of the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health

SPRING / SUMMER 2005

2004 Annual Asian American Health Conference

Dr. Mariano Rey, Henrietta Ho-Asjoe, NYC Council Members John Liu, Alan J. Gerson, Christine C. Quinn, and Robert Jackson

The NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health held its First Annual Asian American Health Conference on September 17 and 18, 2004 at the New York University School of Medicine. The conference was jointly sponsored with the NYU Post-Graduate Medical School.

The objectives of the conference were to address health disparities in Asian Americans; raise awareness about local and federal policies impacting the access to health care and preventive care services; identify key cultural, linguistic and financial barriers; and recognize gaps and priorities in research and training programs.

Over two hundred guests including political leaders, medical and health professionals, community activists and members of the media attended the first night Opening and Awards Ceremony. John Sexton, Ph.D, J.D., President of New York University, gave the opening remarks, acknowledging the importance of addressing health disparities in the Asian American community. Awards were presented in recognition of individual contributions that have promoted the health of Asian Americans.

The National Award was given to Mary Chung Hayashi, founder and President of the National Women's Health Organization (NAWHO) and founder and President of the Iris Alliance Fund. The Local Award was presented to Suki Terada Ports, founder of Voices of Women of Color Against HIV/AIDS and founder and Director of the Family Health Project.

Dr. Mariano Rey, Suki Terada Ports, President John Sexton and Dr. Tung-Tien Sun

During the ceremony, New York City Council Members Alan J. Gerson, John Liu and Christine Quinn were given "Friends of the Center" awards for their support of CSAAH and the Asian American community.

Based on responses from participants and speakers at the end of the conference, guests left with renewed passion and commitment. As one participant noted, "the conference helped to increase cultural awareness and gain knowledge of current health challenges in the Asian American community."

For information about the Second Annual Asian American Health conference in September 2005, please contact Henrietta Ho-Asjoe, M.P.S. at henrietta.ho-asjoe@med.nyu.edu.

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Health Disparities Research Training Program

Front row: Noilyn Abesamis, Lin Frang, Loretta Sun, Stella Lu, Dr.Teddy Chen, Amber Ahmad
Back row: Dr. Henry Chung, Kenny Kwong, Dr. Courtney Chin, Dr. Thomas Tsang, Dr. Fred Huang

In February of 2004, the Health Disparities Research Training Program (HDRTP) was established by the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center (CBWCHC) and the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH) to address the need for more culturally competent research on Asian American health.

The HDRTP seeks to increase the number of potential investigators and research projects focusing on Asian American health disparities and to foster commitment and cultural competency among investigators in the field.

The program, using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, brings together experts and specialists in Asian American health with potential junior investigators to develop research projects with Asian American communities. In contrast to traditional research, CBPR instills greater trust and equity between researchers and communities and improves the quality and validity of research by engaging local knowledge, skills and expertise.

Each year, the HDRTP will train 8 graduate students and health professionals through monthly seminars and an intensive curriculum on topics such as research methodology, data analysis, cultural competency, community access, advocacy and funding for research endeavors. Trainees are individually matched with a faculty mentor and work together with community members, representatives from organizations linked with CSAAH, and senior researchers to initiate and collaborate on a research project addressing Asian American health.

In September of 2004, the HDRTP welcomed their first cohort to the training program. The trainees came from a variety of academic backgrounds: anthropology, dentistry, social work, psychology and medicine. Their research topics include cultural stigma associated with mental health disorders, dental health needs of underserved children, complementary and alternative medicine use, and colorectal cancer screening among Asian Americans.

Trainees have expressed this program has helped change their perceptions of Asian American health and community involvement. “It has been encouraging to know that there are Asian American health care workers that have a genuine concern to serve the Asian community,” said Courtney Chinn, an HDRTP trainee and pediatric dentist. “It has made me more interested in the field of public health and the importance of partnering health care with local communities.”

For more information about the Health Disparities Research Training Program, please contact Amber Ahmad, M.P.H., Training Coordinator at aahmad@cbwchc.org.

South Asian Health Initiative (SAHI)

SAHI staff

In an effort to coordinate and sustain outreach activities targeting the South Asian community, NYU School of Medicine's Center for Immigrant Health (CIH) and the Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH) launched the South Asian Health Initiative (SAHI) in June 2004. SAHI has been working with the Cancer Awareness Network for Immigrant Minority Populations (CANIMP) to provide free education, outreach, and screenings to communities at risk for oral cancer. SAHI also works with the Community Tuberculosis Prevention Program (CTPP) to provide free testing, follow-up, and case management for individuals at risk for tuberculosis (TB).

Among the various risk factors for oral cancer is a practice that prevails among South Asians. The chewing of the betel nut leaf with areca nut (supari) and tobacco (assembled together in a quid known as paan, pictured at right) is a habit that crossed over to the United States with individuals from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet. While paan is commonly believed to merely freshen one's breath and aid in digestion, some of the ingredients also possess the lesser-know characteristic of being carcinogenic. In fact, studies have shown that 80 percent of all oral cancer cases amongst South Asians can be attributed to the combined use of supari and tobacco (chewing and smoking).

SAHI activities include spreading awareness about the dangerous link between the ingredients in paan (including the processed, dry form of paan known as gutka) and oral cancer. SAHI hopes to protect individuals from this malignancy by working in conjunction with South Asian community-based and faith-based organizations. Their efforts include free educational workshops, distribution of materials, collaboration with community-based media, and oral cancer screenings conducted by dentists and trained students. Dr. Gustavo Cruz, Assistant Professor and Director of the Department of Epidemiology and Health Promotion at the NYU College of Dentistry, assisted in the development and supervision of the oral cancer screening programs for SAHI.

In the month of July, initial TB education of the South Asian community was conducted as a component of the SAHI. These activities began with establishing contact with community leaders and community-based organizations that could serve as potential organizing partners. The program is now starting to conduct TB testing in school-based settings, with the start of the academic year. It hopes to expand TB services, including free testing, follow-up (including chest x-ray and medical consultation) and treatment to more organizations that serve the South Asian community.

Supari and tobacco, a combination often used by South Asians, is reported to raise the risk of developing oral cancer.

To better inform SAHI objectives and priorities for the South Asian community, a Community Health Needs Assessment is being conducted over the upcoming several months. Surveying community members using quantitative methods (structured questionnaires) and qualitative methods (focus groups and interviews with community leaders), the research team hopes to uncover perceptions of health status, needs and access and create a broad-stroke epidemiological profile of South Asian immigrants.

SAHI at NYC community health fair

SAHI Community Advisory Board

- Noilyn Abesamis, M.P.H.
- Gaurab Basu
- Jyotsna Changrani, M.D., M.P.H.
- Francesca Gany, M.D.
- Samreen Hasan
- Priya Iyer
- Runi Mukherji, Ph.D.
- Sapna Pandya, M.P.H.
- Suman Saran
- Susan Shah, J.D., M.P.H.
- Sayone Thihalolipavan
- Chau Trinh-Shevrin, Dr.P.H.

For more information about the South Asian Health Initiative, please contact Sapna Pandya, M.P.H. at sapna.pandya@med.nyu.edu.

Kalusugan Coalition

Kalusugan Coalition Members at the site of their first planning retreat at the Oaks in New Rochelle, NY.

The establishment of the Kalusugan Coalition is one of the first attempts to bring together diverse groups interested in improving the health of the Filipino American community in the New York Metropolitan Area.

The impetus for starting a health outreach initiative in this community began in February 2004 when CSAAH reached out to the Filipino American Human Services, Inc. (FAHSI) about collaborative opportunities to address Filipino American health. Shortly thereafter, an ad-hoc group comprised of representatives from FAHSI, CSAAH, as well as Dr. Benjamin Ileto, a well-respected community leader, began to meet regularly to plan the "Filipino Community Health Forum," which took place in April 2004 at the Philippine Consulate General in Manhattan. Simultaneously, CSAAH intiated a Filipino Community Health Needs Assessment to further explore the health priorities, available resources, and possible solutions to improving the community's health.

CSAAH was later invited by the Philippine American Friendship Committee- Community Development Center (PAFCOM-CDC) and Office of Minority and Multicultural Health, NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (OMMH/NJDHSS) to co-sponsor a forum, "A Health Report Card of Our Community." Held in September 2004, this event was in celebration of National Minority Health Month and designed to provide a report card on the health status of the Filipino American community in Jersey City.

These efforts have led to the creation of a community-wide partnership, the Kalusugan Coalition of New York and New Jersey. *Kalusugan* means "health" in Tagalog (Pilipino). The Kalusugan Coalition became a reality through the overwhelming support of several community leaders, concerned individuals, and organizations that acknowledged the importance of empowering the Filipino American community to address health issues.

Since the summer of 2004, this multidisciplinary collaboration has met monthly to reflect on the health needs and quality of life for Filipino Americans in NYC and Jersey City, NJ. A strategic planning retreat held in January 2005 served as a major step towards solidifying this health initiative. Coalition members discussed plans and actions toward a coordinated health initiative targeting Filipinos in NYC and Jersey City, NJ and collectively determined that the coalition's mission is to "create a unified voice to improve the health of the Filipino community in the New York City/Jersey City area through network and resource development, educational activities, research, community action, and advocacy."

The Kalusugan Coalition is comprised of over 20 members who include staff from Filipino and Asian American organizations as well as Filipino artists, students, youth, immigrant advocates, community organizers, health professionals, and academic researchers.

For the next few months, the Kalusugan Coalition seeks to expand outreach efforts and grow its membership base by linking with other concerned individuals and organizations; develop culturally and linguistically appropriate health education activities, materials, and resources; sponsor forums to inform the community about the health status of Filipino Americans; participate in health advocacy efforts; and build the capacity of the coalition through trainings on leadership development, research, advocacy, and consensus building.

Organizational Members

- Damayan Migrant Workers Association
- Filipino American Human Services, Inc.
- Philippine American Friendship Committee-Community Development Center
- Kinding Sindaw
- Sumisibol
- NYU Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program & Institute
- NYU CSAAH

Individual Members

- Fr. David Aguilar
- Kara Cadag, M.P.H
- Jonathan Chan
- Lily Divino, M.S.S.W, M.P.H.
- Benjamin Ileto, M.D.
- Luis Pedron
- Kevin Nadal, M.A.
- Mutya San Agustin, M.D.

To learn more about the Kalusugan Coalition, please contact Noilyn Abesamis, M.P.H. at noilyn.abesamis@med.nyu.edu.

Asian American Hepatitis B Program

Dr. Thomas Tsang, NYC Council Member Alan J. Gerson, Dr. Alex Sherman, and Rebecca Sze.

In the Summer of 2004, the New York City Council and the Office of the Mayor awarded a grant to the Asian American Hepatitis B Program, a coalition of New York City non-profit organizations, to address the high prevalence of Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection among Asian Americans. The partnership includes representatives from American Cancer Society, Bellevue Hospital Center, Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, Chinese American Planning Council, Community Healthcare Network, Gouverneur Healthcare Services, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan, Inc., the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYU Downtown Hospital and the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health.

Compared with the less than 1% prevalence of HBV infection in the general population, the prevalence of HBV infection in the Asian community has been observed to be as high as 25%. To address this glaring health disparity, the Asian American Hepatitis B Program will provide outreach, education, screening, vaccination, and treatment for Hepatitis B to the city's Asian American population. During this first year, the program will target 2,000 individuals from the Chinese and Korean communities.

In December, the NYC City Council held a press conference to officially launch the start of the program. Community-based screenings will take place in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens and will be conducted by the coalition partners. This program's outreach and education strategy will include newspaper advertisements and radio programs in the major Chinese and Korean media and educational materials that will be translated into Chinese and Korean.

At the end of April, more than 1,200 people attended 18 screening events conducted by program partners. Approximately 30% of the screened participants needed vaccination which will be provided by the screening sites. About 20% of the screened participants will require treatment.

For more information about the Asian American Hepatitis B Program, please contact Ruchel Ramos, M.P.A. at ruchel.ramos@med.nyu.edu.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami: The Context, The Response, The Future

On Tuesday, March 1, CSAAH and the NYU Asian / Pacific / American Studies Program & Institute sponsored a symposium titled: "The Indian Ocean Tsunami: The Context, The Response, The Future." This event marked the first University-wide effort to address the tsunami disaster that occurred on December 26, 2004 and had a direct devastating effect on a dozen Asian countries.

Speakers included faculty from a variety of programs at the NYU School of Medicine and Bellevue Hospital and experts from the World Health Organization, Doctors Without Borders - USA, Rider University, the Overseas Development Institute and the United Nations.

The first panel led by Drs. Mariano Rey, Biju Matthew and Richard Alderslade discussed the context of the tsunami disaster, describing the political, social, and cultural histories of the area and identifying the main issues affecting the area as a result of the tsunami.

A subsequent panel on the immediate relief efforts and the sustainable development processes in the region was led by Dr. Lewis Goldfrank. Joining Dr. Goldfrank were Dr. Roshini Rajapaksa, Dr. Adele Harmer, and Catrin Schulte-Hillen, MPH. This group concentrated their discussion on the need for a thoughtful, culturally competent approach to disaster relief.

The last panel to take the stage discussed the needs for mental health, assessment and treatment of infectious diseases and rehabilitation of physical injuries in the region. The panel included Drs. Allen Keller, Karen Day, Jack Saul, and Alex Moroz.

Throughout the symposium, it was stressed that local coordination of relief efforts combined with the empowerment of previously established community-based organizations - with external training or resources - work best in providing help to a region suddenly in such great need.

Speakers at the colloquium.

HIGHLIGHTS:

CENTER STUDENT INVESTIGATORS (CSI):

Sophie Chheang is a third year medical student at the New York University School of Medicine. During the summer between her first and second years of medical school, she received a grant from the Arnold P. Gold Foundation to assess knowledge and awareness of AIDS in the immigrant Cambodian community of Long Beach, California. Drs. Mariano Rey and Chau Trinh-Shevrin served as her faculty mentors on this project.

HIV/AIDS Awareness in the Cambodian Immigrant Community

Ms. Chheang studied how factors such as education, years of immigration, and health insurance, affected immigrant's understanding of the transmission and natural history of HIV and AIDS. To determine whether there were differences in knowledge and awareness of AIDS for Cambodian immigrants living in the United States with Cambodians living in Cambodia, her study compared findings from California with the World Health Organization's study on HIV/AIDS knowledge in Cambodia. Not surprisingly, higher education levels were associated with greater knowledge of AIDS prevention.

Currently, Ms. Chheang is conducting clinical research on prostate cancer at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. She plans to take a year off after completing her third year of medical school to pursue a Masters in Public Health so that she can receive more formal training in conducting population-based studies.

More than 25 medical, public health, and undergraduate students, including 12 NYU medical students, are now working with the Center earning the title of Center Student Investigator (CSI). For more information about this program, please contact Rhodora Ursua, M.P.H. at rhodora.ursua@med.nyu.edu.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

May 19, 2005, 5:00-7:00 pm
First National Asian and Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Prevention Day
NYU Medical Center
Schwartz Lecture Hall F

June 16, 2005, 5:00-7:00 pm
The Validity of Race-Based Medicine Mekbib Gemeda, Director Office of Diversity Affairs
NYU Medical Center
Schwartz Lecture Hall F

September 23-24, 2005
2nd Annual Asian American Health Conference NYU School of Medicine

STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Chau Trinh-Shevrin, Dr.P.H. was elected to the Board of Directors of the Public Health Association of New York City.

Henrietta Ho-Asjoe, MPS was elected to the Board of Directors of Henry Street Settlement and to the Board of Directors of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families Services.

Noilyn Abesamis, MPH was selected as a Fellow in the New American Leaders Fellowship Program. Ms. Abesamis was also elected Secretary of the Asian Pacific Islander Caucus of the American Public Health Association.

NYU CSAAH Community Outreach Events:

2004

April 13th
NYU Medical Student Forum

April 13th
Health Challenges for Asian American Populations Seminar

April 28th
Filipino Community Health Forum

May 20th
Health Care for Asian Immigrants Seminar

June 24th
Diabetes Among South Asians Seminar

September 17th-18th
First Annual Asian American Health Conference

September 25th
Minority Health Forum: A Health Report Card for Our Community

October 21st
Breast Cancer Among Chinese Americans

November 18th
Mental Health Among South Asians

November 19th
Community-Based Participatory Research

December 10th
Women's Health Symposium

December 15th
Common Clinical Diseases Among Asian American Children Seminar

2005

January 20th
Challenges Facing Asian American Health Practitioners Seminar: Orientalism, Cultural Diversity, and the New World Order

January 30th
Kalusugan Coalition Strategic Planning Retreat

March 1st
The Indian Ocean Tsunami Symposium: The Context, The Response, The Future

March 17th
Asian American Oral Health Seminar: Current Findings and Research Needs

April 21st
Issues of Identity and Health: The Case of Transnational Adoptees

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