

Asian American and Pacific Islander
Cancer Survivors Capacity Building Project

Asian American & Pacific Islander Cancer Support Groups Case Study

A Project of the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

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Purpose of Asian American and Pacific Islander Cancer Support Groups Case Study

This Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Cancer Support Groups Case Study highlights successes, challenges, and best practices for developing cancer support groups specific to AAPI ethnic communities. While there are increasing numbers of AAPI ethnic specific cancer support groups available, there has not been a publication to showcase specific support groups that are in existence at varying stages of development. This case study was developed to assist organizations that are interested in developing cancer support groups that are AAPI ethnic specific. In addition, this publication is in response to the need for organizations to proactively research and compile information about ethnic cancer support groups.

Methodology

The APIAHF/Asian American & Pacific Islander Cancer Survivors Capacity Building (AAPI CSCB) Project staff recruited six members to be a part of a National AAPI Cancer Support Group Task Force. The goal of the Task Force was to work with APIAHF staff in developing a case study to highlight the successes, challenges, and best practices of developing cancer support groups for AAPI communities. APIAHF convened teleconferences with the Task Force members to develop the interview protocol and ensure that the questions asked were relevant and appropriate. As a final product, APIAHF compiled the information gathered through the interviews to develop the AAPI Cancer Support Group Case Study, which highlights cancer support groups throughout the United States and the U.S. Pacific Island Jurisdictions. APIAHF staff and Task Force members conducted in-depth interviews with AAPI cancer support group facilitators as well as those who started the AAPI cancer support groups. Interview topics included the support group development, challenges and barriers to forming the support group, methods, structure, and perceived benefits. In total, eleven facilitators were interviewed in person or via telephone between June and September 2006. For the facilitators that were unable to be interviewed, the interview questions were provided for written responses. A draft of the case study was reviewed by the Task Force members and finalized by APIAHF prior to the dissemination of the document. The case study is intended for local and state health departments, AAPI serving community-based organizations, cancer programs, and support programs interested in developing cancer support groups and improving cancer survivorship support services for AAPI communities.

Interview Protocol Questions

1. Why did you choose to start this support group? How did the support group start?
2. What are the format and characteristics of this support group? (Could you describe a typical meeting of your group?)
3. How many people participate in your group? What AAPI communities/community do they represent? (What are the cultural and/or unique characteristics of the population that this support group serves? What is unique and important to know about the community you work with?)
4. Where and how frequently do you meet?
5. What are the facilitator's background, qualifications, and role?
6. How do you promote this support group to its intended target population?
7. Do you follow up with those who attended the support group? If you do, how?
8. What resources did you need to get started? What resources do you provide?
9. What were some of your early successes? Challenges?
10. How do you get people to keep coming back? What changes did you make to ensure participants returned?
11. What advice would you offer to others doing this work?

AAPI Cancer Support Groups Successes

The common underlying successes shared by the interviewees and the written responses are summarized below. The support group successes can be categorized into several themes - increased patient support, knowledge, and empowerment, increased outreach of survivors, and involvement of male survivors and children.

Increased Patient Support, Knowledge, and Empowerment

Several of the support groups shared that the survivors felt supported and were able to open up and share their feelings and gained assertiveness in managing their care (obtaining second opinions, conducting research on prescriptions and medical terminology). Facilitators found that the support group was successful when there was consistent attendance of the groups and active participation within the group and with outreach and recruitment. Another key success that emerged out of the support group was that the women and the community were no longer ignorant about the disease. For example, participating in the support group triggered questions as well as realizations within the Tongan community about cancer; people began thinking about factors leading to cancer, such as diet, the bombings in the Pacific, and lifestyle, and how those factors could apply to their own lives.

Increased Outreach of Survivors

Another success of many of these support groups has been increased outreach of survivors, especially through different media outlets, such as radio, print, and television. In American Samoa, their first survivorship meeting achieved television media coverage on a particularly wide scale. Several of their survivors were interviewed, and a broadcast in both English and Samoan highlighted the event. In the last two months, two of their survivors have been on early morning television shows to publicize the group, and a few of the survivors have been on morning radio programs to encourage survivors to join the group. Building strong relationships with ethnic media can direct survivors to these groups and increase visibility of survivorship and support resources. For example, Herald Cancer Association in San Gabriel, CA has a solid relationship with Chinese media and the support group advertisement is part of a 45,000/month circulation of the media outlet.

Involvement of Male Survivors and Children

In the Vietnamese cancer support group, the co-facilitator is a male cancer survivor and his presence helps to encourage other men, whether in or out of the support group, to embrace cancer issues more comfortably. In addition, it is a success when non survivors and family members or friends impacted by cancer participate in a support group. It is an accomplishment when families become supportive of the participants and have taken proactive roles in helping them obtain survivorship care and services. For the Samoan National Nurses Association, male cancer patients and survivors have become interested in and involved in the support groups, leading the organization to develop a male cancer support group. For the Chinese Women's Cancer Support Group, they organized a children's support group for children ages 4-14 for the children of the women survivors. This children's support group has been well received by the children and community.

AAPI Cancer Support Groups Challenges

Limitation of Resources

One facilitator mentioned that there are not many resources shared among those in the support groups in terms of services, materials, and programs. Meetings and events happen outside the support groups, but there is a lack of awareness of such. Another facilitator said that she would like to be able to provide broader and deeper perspectives and resources for cancer patients and that she could have been more creative. She wishes that there was a "How to Start a Support Group" guide that could have guided her on how to train volunteers and other logistical matters. It was more difficult to learn things along the way. If there were a guide, she believes that the following topics should be addressed: 1) How to lead a support group; 2) What activities to include into group sessions (i.e. what to do during support group sessions to increase patient expression/interaction); 3) Forms that can be used to recruit/follow up with patients; 4) Directory of existing organizations

Transportation Concerns

Some facilitators stated that patients often have to rely on their children and spouses to bring them to the support group sessions, which can lead to sporadic attendance. To rectify this situation, one facilitator often picks up patients along the way to ensure that they can come or have scheduled meetings in locations convenient to the participants.

Funding

Most of the support group facilitators interviewed agreed that with lack of consistent and substantial funding, there are difficulties in “staffing” the support groups with qualified facilitators, coordinating resources for the meetings, advertising the availability of the support groups, outreaching for meetings, and increasing attendance of survivors. Another similar issue is the restrictive nature of some of the cancer funding sources. While many of the AAPI cancer support groups were able to get started through their main contingent of breast cancer survivors and with breast cancer focused funding, there is still a need to ensure a space for other types of cancer survivors to get support services. Facilitators have had to be creative in stretching funding for specific cancer sites in order to accommodate other cancer sites and cancer survivors in general. In addition, it was found that often times support group participants compensate for the lack of funding by donating their own resources.

Another facilitator mentioned that it would be beneficial to be more formally linked up with a hospital because there are more opportunities to establish sustainable funding from different foundations through their reputation rather than being a stand alone entity. This poses a challenge to groups and coalitions that do not have 501(c) 3 incorporation or a fiscal sponsor and may create a barrier in being eligible for different funding sources. However, with changes in hospital management, being a program under a hospital it can also affect the viability of the support group, due to management decisions and power to cut out the program if they do not recognize the benefits.

Difficulty in Recruitment

A challenge addressed by the majority of the support group facilitators was the recruitment of cancer survivors and structure of the cancer support group. One facilitator mentioned that she lost members of her support group because a new support group was formed in the same geographic area. Other facilitators stated that attendance is not always be consistent for some of the female cancer survivors because they are the caretakers of the family and the needs of their children and spouses always come first. In addition, some facilitators addressed that it is still difficult to persuade women to come to the support group because it is common for some cancer patients to keep quiet about their prognosis. Many cancer patients may resist invitations out of fear that there was not a comfortable or safe space for them to express their feelings. Another tremendous challenge for the Tongan support group was breaking through cultural barriers in their efforts to outreach to the community; participants felt that cancer and other health issues were not as much of a priority in the community, and consequently, that their attempts to educate and advocate were not very well received.

Structure of Support Groups

For support groups that are still relatively new, there remains a challenge of creating a program for each meeting and getting more survivors to attend and remain interested. There can be a “push and pull” to have a format that is more psychosocial in nature where the survivors can open up their feelings and talk about their issues associated with cancer or a format that is more educational with speakers from different fields. The type of format of the support groups can either invite or deter new cancer survivors from joining the group. With the more psychosocial focused support groups, some challenges faced include the attitudes of patients’ families and that they sometimes do not want to express themselves in the support group. In terms of the quantity of support groups, some facilitators mentioned that there are not enough support group facilitators and not enough support groups.

For the Pacific Islander communities, there are challenges in ensuring the effectiveness of the support groups. For the support group in Palau, they have learned that during the group, there are so many emotions exchanged and they may need a counselor, social worker, or someone from the church who can help with appropriate comfort. With the Tongan community, there are issues with prioritizing health and many community members often do not attend forums on health or screenings because they are bound by other social obligations. With the Samoan community, there is the cultural belief that a cancer diagnosis means death and that having cancer bears a strong stigma, and therefore, there is no need to explore survivorship services.

Recommendations for Future Development of AAPI Cancer Support Groups

The following section lists recommendations for future development of AAPI cancer support groups compiled from all of the facilitators interviewed. The categories were adapted from Lei-Chun Fung's 2003 article in the Asian American and Pacific Islander Journal of Health entitled "Involving Cancer Survivors in Cancer Awareness and Support: Lessons Learned from 10 Years of Experience with Chinese Women in San Francisco."

Development of Programs

- Recognize importance of grassroots and community based outreach
- Develop close linkage with local media: radios, newspapers, and television
- Garner support from program administrators
- Be patient, open-minded, flexible, creative, and persistent
- Include cultural aspects such as providing food and involving family

Implementation of Programs

- Use committed bilingual and bicultural group facilitators
- Conduct services in the members' own language
- Promote trust and support from facilitators and train more facilitators
- Promote trust and support among members
- Conduct on-going communication and follow-up support to members outside group meetings
- Integrate patient navigation and patient empowerment within support group
- Share relevant cancer educational and support resources with members and facilitators
- Maintain close network with health, social, and mental services for appropriate referrals

Continuation of Programs

- Affiliate with a reputable and established community based organization, clinic, or agency within the community
- Collaborate with community partners: local, state, and national
- Develop grant writing capabilities to obtain sustainable funding
- Highlight growth and development opportunities for members
- Believe that what one is doing makes a difference in people's lives

Other comments:

- Format of the support groups should be dependent on needs of survivors. The focus can be solely educational speakers, psychosocial support without outside speakers, or a combination of speakers and psychosocial support.
- Sustainability- partnering is important and maintain continuous services; partner with other AAPI organizations and with mainstream organizations
- Continuation of faith-based approaches can assist with outreach and recruitment, establishment of sustainable partnership, and encourage patient empowerment.

Highlighted AAPI Cancer Support Groups

American Cancer Society Vietnamese Cancer Support Group

Xiem "Mai" Tran is the facilitator of Vietnamese cancer support groups that are sponsored by American Cancer Society (ACS) and held in San Jose, California. The support groups began in 2002 at the recommendation of American Cancer Society, who recognized the need for a culturally and linguistically specific support group in an area that caters to one of the largest Vietnamese-American populations in the United States. Since the support groups' inception, Ms. Tran and a male co-facilitator have coordinated and led in-language group sessions that are once a

month and are comprised of about 25-30 Vietnamese cancer patients and survivors. Each support group session involves a presentation component, in which local health care providers and cancer program staff present on relevant cancer treatment and survivorship topics, as well as the opportunity for participants to share their experiences and advice for one another.

The support groups, in their development and implementation, have proven to be successful. The assistance of local physicians in compiling the contact information of Vietnamese cancer patients was instrumental in helping facilitators to outreach to and invite patients to support group sessions. In addition, the provision of meeting space by ACS in a centrally located site has enabled local patients to easily access resources from the support group. However, it is primarily the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants that have enabled the support group to be sustainable and continue growing. The participants are proactive in increasing visibility of the support group by inviting cancer patients and survivors that they know personally to support group meetings and events and are committed to fostering a family-like atmosphere to draw newcomers into returning. The atmosphere is reputedly comfortable and inviting, as reflected by the consistent attendance of most group members.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Xiem "Mai" Tran** at (925) 945-6239 or at maitran@lerios.org.

Herald Cancer Association Chinese Cancer Support Groups

Lucy Young is a facilitator of Chinese support groups at the Herald Cancer Association in San Gabriel, California. The support groups, which are offered in Mandarin and Cantonese and are cancer-site specific, began in 2002 when Lucy was a staff member at the American Cancer Society. Shortly after their inception, the support groups were integrated into the array of services offered by the Herald Cancer Association, where Ms. Young is currently employed. The support groups meet once a month for two hours and are generally structured to allow presentations from local health care providers and cancer program staff. The groups are structured so that presentations provide relevant treatment and survivorship topics and opportunities for participants to share their personal experiences with cancer. The average attendance of the support groups, one of which is open specifically to breast cancer patients and the other offered to all cancer patients, is 30-40 individuals.

Support group facilitators are trained, and therefore, are competent at addressing patient needs in a group setting, managing and facilitating group discussion and dynamics, and developing trust and general rapport with participants. The facilitators' commitment led the support groups to develop a strong, respected reputation in the community and is thus correlated with the increase in support group participants over time. The visibility and growing interest of the support groups has increased the need for more trained support group facilitators. With growing numbers in the existing support groups, current facilitators fear that the sessions will become increasingly impersonal for participants, and therefore, are looking to newly established caregiver networks and community volunteers to assist with developing and facilitating more support groups.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Lucy Young** at (626) 286-2600 x 13 or at lucy@cchc.org.

MD Anderson Chinese Cancer Support Group

May Shen started a Chinese Cancer Support group in 2001, after recognizing a need for a culturally and linguistically appropriate support group in the Chinese community while experiencing her own journey with cancer. Since the inception of the support group, participants meet once a month at a designated location and the support group caters to patients of all cancer types. Sessions are conducted in Mandarin and Taiwanese and usually integrate one or all of the following: 1) presentations from health care providers and cancer program staff on topics related to treatment and survivorship; 2) patient sharing of their own experiences with cancer and advice they may have for one another; and

3) opportunities for individuals with the same type(s) of cancer to gather in smaller groups for discussion. The support groups generally draw 30-90 participants, depending on patient's interest in designated presentation topics of each session.

Ms. Shen attributes the large attendance of the support groups to the publicity it has received through reputable ethnic media and ethnic church congregations. In addition, patients have been able to establish trust with her and fellow support group attendees, which has fostered rapport and camaraderie within the group. In addition, community members associate the support group a sole source of information, resources, and support for patients, survivors, and families. The facilitation of support group sessions in language and the ability of Ms. Shen to relate to support group participants as a survivor herself, have also drawn more community members into exploring issues of survivorship either as support group participants and/or volunteers. The growth of the support group not only indicates the success of ethnic and linguistic specific survivorship care, but also highlights the growing need of services to accommodate for the increase in participants.

For more information about this support group, please contact **May Shen** at (281) 491-2710 or by email at whemayshen@yahoo.com.

Chinese Women's Cancer Support Group

In 1994, Lei-Chun Fung started the Chinese Women's Cancer Support Group at the Chinatown Public Health Center in San Francisco, California. The Chinatown Public Health Center is part of the San Francisco Department of Public Health's Community Health Network of San Francisco and has been in existence for 35 years. Initially planned as a six-week education and support program for Chinese women with cancer, it has evolved to an on-going group that meets on the first and third Saturdays of the month from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm. During the group's meetings, women discuss concerns and issues regarding their illness, such as uncertainties surrounding surgery and treatment decisions, concerns about nutrition and side effects of treatments, family relationships, and issues surrounding death. A social worker and public health nurse, both of whom speak Cantonese, facilitate the groups. Group facilitators have helped women examine the emotional and psychological issues they face as they cope with the illness. They utilize a variety of Eastern and Western techniques such as *Tai Chi*, *Qi Gong*, body massage, muscle relaxation, guided visualization, art therapy, music and family reconstruction to assist women in their healing and recovery. About 15-20 women with various types of cancer, most commonly breast, lung, nasopharyngeal, colorectal, and cervical cancers, participate in the women's cancer support group.

In 1999, the Chinatown Public Health Center organized a support group called "Dr. Play" Children's Support Group for children ages 4-14. This group was started as a response to the need for child care to the young children of the women participating in the support group. The mothers expressed difficulties in sharing their experience of cancer with their children. The "Dr. Play" Children's Support Group recognizes that, in response to parental illness, children may experience fear, anxiety, guilt, helplessness, and depression. Children need a safe environment to express feelings related to their parents' illness, trauma, and hospitalization. This support group is led by an art therapist who use art, play, and sand to assist the children in exploring their feelings of fears, worries, losses, and grief. There are about two to six children, ages 4-14, that participate in the children's support group regularly.

For more information about these support groups, please contact **Lei-Chun Fung** at (415) 364-7908 or by email at lei-chun.fung@sfdph.org.

Palau Cancer Support Group

The cancer support group in Palau began as an effort of the Comprehensive Cancer Control Program of Palau during 2006. The cancer support group stemmed from recommendations based on the island's cancer survivors, who had participated in the Cancer Coalition. They recognized the emerging population of survivors on the island and the

need to address the paucity of services available for this community. The support group, to this date, has only had one meeting and is scheduled to meet once a month at various locations, depending on availability and cost. Eight individuals attended the first support group meeting and engaged in "talk story" and planned activities. It is anticipated that some members will continue attending the support group meetings under the current support group structure. Although the group has only convened once, it has been met with positive feedback from community members and participants. Participants feel a sense of ownership in the group and feel encouraged to participate in activities outside of group sessions, including the planning of fundraising events for September Cancer Awareness Month and holding positions of leadership in the Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition. Their empowerment has increased their commitment to sustaining the support group as demonstrated by their active outreach to cancer survivors, efforts to educate community members about cancer and its local effect, and camaraderie with one another.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Darnelle Worsick** at the Comprehensive Cancer Control Program-Palau by email at d_worsick@palau-health.net.

Taulama for Tongans Breast Cancer Support Group

Leafa Taumoepeau is the Executive Director for Taulama for Tongans, a nonprofit organization in the San Francisco Bay Area that was established in 1998. Taulama for Tongans was funded by the Pacific Islander Cancer Control Network (PICCN) in 1998 to start a cancer support group for the Tongan community. While the support group's funding ended in 2001, during its inception five participants attended the meetings one to two times a week at the Taulama office in San Mateo, California. During the support group sessions, time was allotted for participants to "talk story" about their personal experiences with cancer. In addition, group time was used for participants to develop outreach projects to educate the Tongan community about cancer and other chronic diseases that are highly prevalent in the region.

During its existence, the support group was successful in meeting the needs of the participants. Participants felt that their knowledge of cancer had improved due to their participation in the group sessions. They had considered cancer as a death sentence, and therefore, had no notion of cancer survivorship. In addition, support group participants and the community members that they had outreached to, felt that the discussion of cancer survivorship inspired them to think more about the disease in the context of the Tongan community. They became motivated to explore the causes of high prevalence of cancer among Tongans and how to become involved in advocacy and outreach.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Leafa Taumoepeau** at (650) 372-0806 or by email at ltaumoepeau@co.sanmateo.ca.us.

Samoan National Nurses' Association Samoan Cancer Support Groups

Sala Mataalii is the Co-Founder and President of the Samoan National Nurses' Association (SNNA) based in Carson, California. The nonprofit organization was established in 1996 and aims to address health issues and provide resources for the Samoan community. Since 2001, SNNA's cancer support group has typically catered to about 20 cancer patients and survivors per session. The support group offers a space for individuals to share their cancer experiences, as well as exposure to relevant treatment and survivorship topics through presentations given by local community providers and advocates. The group meets at the SNNA office and is facilitated by SNNA staff, Marina Tupua, who is a nurse and has experience as a caregiver for cancer patients.

The support group has been instrumental in helping cancer patients and survivors speak publicly and confidently about their experiences. Prior to their involvement with the support group, participants felt uncomfortable addressing their diseases before people outside of their families because of taboo surrounding the nature of the subject. Also, most individuals had the misconception that cancer is a death sentence, hence their hesitation to seek

encouragement and assistance in seeking long-term care options. In response, the support group instilled a sense of empowerment among the participants, prompting them to proactively seek out treatment and survivorship services, and to become involved in outreach and advocacy events sponsored by SNNA or other cancer organizations in the Los Angeles area. The support group has attracted the interest of male cancer survivors, prompting SNNA to create a male-specific, prostate cancer support group. The support group would like to continue increasing its membership, but is met with difficulty in obtaining the names of cancer patients and survivors in the Samoan community.

For more information about the support groups, please contact **Marion Hanneman** or **Marina Tupua** at (310) 952-1115 or by email at health@snn.org.

Filipino Breast Cancer Support Group

Lady Fabian is the facilitator of a Filipino Breast Cancer Support Group in San Francisco, California. The support group began in 2004 and caters to an average of six to eight cancer patients and survivors per session. The group convenes at the West Bay Pilipino Service Center in San Francisco once a month, during which the group gathers to discuss their experiences with cancer, as well as other health issues such as cholesterol, nutrition, and hypertension. Since the inception of the support group, participants have increased their understanding of cancer and willingness to learn more about the disease. The group has also been a safe place for those affiliated with cancer indirectly, such as being a spouse or a family member of someone with cancer, to come and learn about the disease and the issues that their loved ones face during treatment. Additionally, the support group is also a hub of information that provides educational materials and assists patients with appointments. However, Ms. Fabian recognizes the continuing challenges and needs of the support group. There is a need to continue advertising the support group to the Filipino community and to support the development of different programs and activities for participants.

For more information about this support group, please contact **West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center** at (415) 882-7803 or **Lady Fabian** at (650) 991-6023 or by email at reynalady@comcast.net.

Korean Cancer Support Group

Hee Young Jane Park is the facilitator of a Korean Support Group affiliated with Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA. The support group, which is sponsored by the Wellness Community-Pasadena, convenes 12 cancer patients and survivors bi-monthly; one meeting is specifically designated for newly diagnosed patients while the other meeting is open to all patients and survivors. Group sessions involve sharing time, during which participants can share their personal experiences with cancer and offer support to others, as well as bonding activities, which often take place outside of group sessions. Ms. Park also does follow-up sessions with patients, if necessary.

The support group has been pivotal in increasing patients' and survivors' ability to cope with their prognosis. Through interactions with one another, participants have been "unfrozen" from the shock that accompanies their condition and can discuss their feelings more openly. Also, participants have been more willing to take a more proactive role in their care by being more assertive in their interactions with doctors, obtaining second opinions, and conducting more research on treatments and long-term survivorship issues, and learning medical terminology to aid with their personal understanding and management of their treatment. The camaraderie between the participants has also been a positive aspect of the group; their support of one another extends beyond the support group sessions and lessens the awkwardness that can sometimes exist during group sessions. Participants have expressed that, although the support group has been a good source of information and support, there is the need to continue to address the gaps in service/programs for K cancer patients and improved outreach to community members about services.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Hee Young Jane Park** at (626) 394-6331 or by email at hodongp@yahoo.com.

Guam Communications Network Chamorro Cancer Support Groups

Lola Sablan-Santos is the facilitator of a cancer support group that is hosted by Guam Communications Network (GCN), a nonprofit organization serving Chamorro/Guamanian populations in Long Beach, California. The support group began as an effort of the PATH project for women in 2002 and meets every other month at a participant's home either in San Diego, Los Angeles, or Irvine. The group typically hosts 8-15 participants per meeting and uses their two to four hours together to discuss their individual experiences with cancer treatment and survivorship and share updates on their involvement with advocacy, such as their involvement at conferences, people that they have networked with, and new information that they have learned.

Since its inception, the support group has experienced much success. The women have been able to establish a strong camaraderie with one another that extends to outside of their formal time together in the support group; the philosophy of "food, fun, and fellowship" that pervades the mission of the support group has allowed the women to bond over cooking, activities, and prayer, all of which have strengthened the way that the women support and interact with one another. In addition, the commitment of GCN staff in following up with the women individually has allowed them to view the group as a place of trust and confidentiality, which has been essential in breaking down the barriers between the participants and access to survivorship care. The participants also have, as a result of their involvement with the support group, become more empowered in the way that they approach their care. For instance, many of them have taken an active role in advocacy by becoming involved with various outreach efforts and participating at national cancer conferences. On a personal level, the support group has equipped these women with a newfound confidence to approach their physicians about issues arising with their care.

The primary challenge was the initial recruitment of people to join the support group. Because of the cultural factors that exist in the Chamorro community, such as the value for privacy and discomfort of discussing "taboo" issues such as cancer, many of the women had neglected to attend the group meetings, despite their expressed interest in participating. However, GCN has taken the time of one year to mobilize the support groups in different areas of Southern California and is in the process of developing a more structured Chamorro Cancer Survivors Network, through funding from the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Lola Sablan-Santos** at (562) 989-5690 or by email at lolas@guamcomnet.org.

American Samoa Cancer Survivors Support Group

The American Samoa Cancer Survivors Support Group first convened on June 12, 2006, and since its inception, has maintained the regular attendance of 17 members. The development of the support group was inspired by the American Samoan Community Cancer Coalition, a group that is dedicated to addressing the various needs of cancer patients and survivors on American Samoa. During the June through August period, the group hosted three meetings during which participants became acquainted with one another, shared their personal experiences and perspectives of cancer, and joined the Coalition's leadership in dialogue about methods to raise awareness in the community about cancer survivorship and increase support group membership. The group, which meets once a month, currently does not have a specific model by which it will operate during each support group meeting, but current participants will determine such a model as the support group continues.

Early assessments of the support group show that it holds promise in mobilizing community members to become more actively involved against the fight against cancer on the island. The members quickly committed themselves to creating outreach campaigns, such as media projects and have demonstrated strides in their own personal journeys

with cancer by publicly speaking about their experiences. The youth of the group, however, lends itself to more development and improvement. Cultural factors continue to serve as a challenge in promoting the support group. For instance, community members, despite their interest in cancer survivorship, do not attend if there is not a personal invitation, even if promotional materials state that all are welcome. Other challenges include linguistic and educational disparities as well as the prevailing belief that cancer is synonymous with death. However, the group is still working on how to address these challenges and continues to provide survivorship support to the community.

For more information, please contact **Luana Scanlan** at (684) 258-6675 or by email at lmyscanlan@yahoo.com.

Thai Breast Cancer Support Group

"Nid" Waraporn Tiaprasit and Lola Fisher are facilitators for a Thai support group sponsored by The Wellness Community-Santa Monica in Los Angeles, California. Since its inception, the support group has typically hosted 12 cancer patients and survivors per session and convenes twice a month for 2 ½ hours. The structure of the support group allots time for the women to share and fellowship with one another through lunches provided by the women themselves. The support group has been able to meet the needs of the participants by giving them a safe space to share their experiences, receive counseling and encouragement from each other and the facilitators, and exchange advice. In addition, the women have expressed that the support group was instrumental in increasing their confidence and ability to speak to their doctors about their concerns.

A primary challenge facing the support group is the sustainability of meeting space. The group currently meets at Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles that lends their space to the group; however, changes within hospital management can change how greatly the support group is prioritized in the distribution of hospital space. Other challenges include support group attendance, which often varies because the women have transportation issues or cannot participate regularly due to other commitments. The facilitators are working through these challenges in creative ways to ensure continued delivery of support services to the community.

For more information, please contact **"Nid" Waraporn Tiaprasith** and **Lola Fisher** at (310) 314-2555 or (213) 629-5712.

American Cancer Society-Chinese Support Groups

Nancy Liao is the Director of Patient and Family Services of the Asian Initiatives Division of American Cancer Society in New York. The division currently conducts six Chinese support groups are either catered specifically to breast cancer patients and survivors or to those of all cancer sites. Four of the support groups are conducted monthly at the ACS office in Flushing, NY or at Bellevue Hospital or Maimonides Medical Cancer Center. Two support groups, which are affiliated with religious groups, meet at their respective places of worship; the Christian cancer support group meets bi-monthly at the Bowne Street Community Church and the Buddhist support group convenes at the Tzu-Chi Foundation periodically. During the support group sessions, in addition to group sharing, speakers from various cancer related fields, such as oncologists, pain management specialists, and surgeons, presented on topics of interest. For the Christian cancer support group, Reverend Paul Lin provides a supportive program through a five-pronged approach: 1) A "Growing in Faith" series; 2) Musical Therapy; 3) Spiritual Exercises; 4) Creative Activities; and 5) Sports. Since the inception of the support groups, an average of 30 cancer patients and survivors attend each support group.

The support group has been largely successful in due part to the familiarity of the community with staff members affiliated with support services. Ms. Liao noted that the trust developed between the staff members and the patients have been key in retaining survivors in the group. Additionally, the support group is widely publicized in the community through Chinese media or through word-of-mouth; patients from the support groups often bring family

members and friends to support group sessions and staff members are prompt with following up with newcomers to remind them of future support group meetings.

For more information about this support group, please contact **Nancy Liao** at (718) 886-8890 or by email at nancy.liao@cancer.org.

About the Asian American and Pacific Islander Cancer Survivors Capacity Building Project

The Asian American and Pacific Islander Cancer Survivors Capacity Building (AAPI CSCB) Project is a five year project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the program announcement 03050. This project serves the AAPI cancer survivor population through the facilitation of a network of cancer support groups and resources and provides capacity building and trainings to mainstream and AAPI serving organizations. The AAPI CSCB Project Consortium Partners include Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations, Family Health Center, Inc. of Worcester, MA, and Kalihi-Palama Health Center.

About the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

The Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) is a national advocacy organization dedicated to promoting policy, program, and research efforts to improve the health and well-being of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. APIAHF's mission is to enable AAPIs to attain the highest possible level of health and well-being. APIAHF envisions a multicultural society where AAPIs are included and represented in health, political, social and economic areas, and where there is social justice for all.

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