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## IACAN Sponsors a Dialogue with Indian Experts on Cancer



IACAN's distinguished panel of experts (from left to right) - Dr. Sewa Legha, Dr. Asha Murthy, Dr. Sunil Krishnan and Dr. Shalin Shah.

By MITALI PAUL

HOUSTON: On Sunday February 28th the Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN) launched its first public educational event at India House with a seminar titled "Cancer Prevalence among Indians – An Open Dialogue with Leading Experts". A bone marrow donor registration drive was also held.

The seminar kicked off with a welcome from IACAN's president Mrs. Gayathri Kongovi. Dr. Anu Rao, IACAN Secretary, introduced the panel of speakers: Drs. Sewa Legha, Asha Murthy, Shalin Shah and Sunil Krishnan. Dr. Sewa Legha, IACAN board member, set the stage with some startling facts. The incidence and patterns of cancer among Indian Americans (3 in 10) falls between that of Indians in India (1 in 10) and Caucasians in the US (4 in 10). The common cancers in India (oral cavity/throat and cervix) are less common in the US but still prevalent among Indian Americans. Colorectal cancer, less common in India,

is gaining in incidence among Indian Americans. Breast, prostate and lung cancers, the more common US cancers, are increasing in incidence in India as they are in Indian Americans. The odds of survival are much lower (30%) in India when compared to the US (66%). By all estimates, survival figures among Indian Americans are lower than those among Caucasians due to health illiteracy, lack of screening and late diagnosis.

The common warning signs of cancer are unusual bleeding/discharge, a non-healing sore, change in bowel/bladder habits, a new lump, a persistent cough, change in appearance of moles, and difficulty swallowing. But by the time the symptoms manifest themselves, the disease has typically advanced. Hence, regular screening and early detection are the best ways to fight cancer.

Dr. Asha Murthy, our next panelist, addressed the topic of breast cancer. Nearly 97% of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer at an early stage survive

for more than 5 yrs. Dr. Murthy recommended a three pronged approach for early detection - mammography, breast self-exam and breast exam by a physician. However in between screenings, staying vigilant and notifying one's doctor of any changes, lumps or discharges from the breast is also important. She also talked about cervical cancer and recommended annual screenings through pap tests in women above 21 or 3 years after they become sexually active.

Dr. Sunil Krishnan, IACAN board member, noted that more Indians in the western world are developing colon cancer. He recommended screening beginning at age 50 using stool testing, flexible sigmoidoscopy, double contrast barium enema, or colonoscopy after discussion with one's doctor. He also talked about prostate cancer and stomach cancer screenings with appropriate tests.

Dr. Shalin Shah ended the presentations with cancers of the head and neck and lung cancer.

He elaborated on the treatment options for cancer – surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

The thought provoking presentations generated an overwhelming audience response and led to a lively and interactive discussion. The questions and answers ranged from broad overview of subjects to specific issues relating to cancer cases.

While there are no specific recommendations proven to prevent cancer, general guidelines include consumption of 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily, whole grains, and less alcohol; limiting the consumption of red meats, no smoking and maintaining a healthy weight and an active lifestyle.

Prevention and early detection play a vital role in the fight against cancer. We plan to have more educational sessions throughout the year.

Please visit the IACAN website at [www.iacannetwork.org](http://www.iacannetwork.org) to learn more about upcoming events and for a copy of the presentations.