

IACAN Focuses on South Asian Diet

By RITU RAJU

HOUSTON: The Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN) presented a talk by eminent physician, author, and speaker Dr. Alok Kalia titled "The South Asian Diet, the Grandmother, and the Scientist- A Cautionary Tale." The event, held on March 13th at India House, attracted a full auditorium; however, even the attendees standing in the rear of the hall would testify that it was worth it! Dr. Kalia is an engaging, entertaining speaker; he presented medical concepts and processes in jargon-free terms that are easy for everyone to understand. His analogies and metaphors, drawn from day-to-day life and combined with the use of easily understandable expressions and examples, made the talk accessible and informative.

Dr. Kalia presented an excellent overview of the reasons for and manifestations of increased heart disease and diabetes among the South Asian community. Ethnic South Asians run greater risk of developing heart disease and diabetes at a younger age with greater severity on account of certain factors



Dr. Alok Kalia speaking at the event

in our genetic make-up; these include higher insulin resistance, a higher ratio of fat to BMI (body mass index), and a greater propensity to store fat around the abdomen. He explained that, contrary to popular belief, saturated fat is not the main culprit for these problems; rather, the overwhelming presence of starch (carbohydrates) in the Indian diet creates insulin

resistance and "addictive hunger." Dr. Kalia referred to this, tongue-in-cheek, as the idli syndrome!

The triple threat in the South Asian diet—atta/maida (highly processed wheat flour), rice, and potatoes—lead to a multitude of problems including the deposit of excess fats in the liver (metabolic syndrome), increased pressure on the pancreas culminating in severe diabetes (hyperinsulinemia), and elevated deposits of fat in the visceral area (which in turn lead to increased risk for heart disease). Dr. Kalia ended his presentation by offering practical, feasible dietary modifications to reduce this triple threat and reduce the risks of diabetes and heart disease. These modifications revolve around the

concept of Glycemic Index (GI) of foods; the Glycemic index determines the rate at which glucose is absorbed into the body. In brief, foods with low GI are highly beneficial because they slow down the release of glucose into the blood and prolong the feeling of "fullness" after a meal, thereby preventing overeating. Dr. Kalia's specific suggestions included the use of brown rice or quinoa (pronounced "keen-wah") in place of rice, eating balanced meals with greater proportions of vegetables, salads, beans and legumes, and fruit, and choosing whole grain, sprouted grains and other fiber-rich foods in place of processed foods that are usually devoid of essential nutrients.

In sum, Dr. Kalia's presentation was extremely informative and enlightening; the lively Q-and-A ses-

sion at the end spoke volumes for the relevance and importance of the topic. Kudos to IACAN for a well-organized, instructive event!

The Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN) is committed to providing proper health education and promoting cancer awareness and prevention through educational seminars in the community. It also provides various services to both patients and care givers through its network of liaisons. IACAN seeks to provide cancer information, assist in navigating available medical care, access and pool available resources, counsel on support services, address culture-specific grief, end of life/loss and bereavement issues.

For more information visit www.iacannetwork.org or call 713-370-3489.

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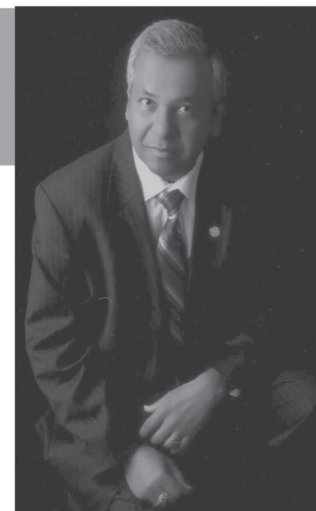
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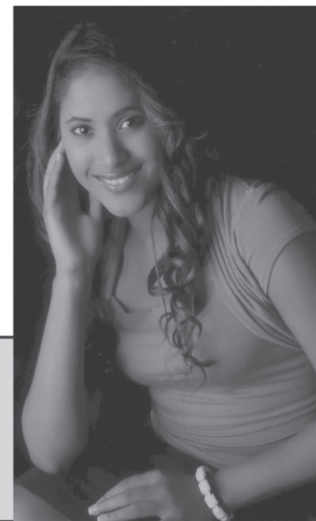
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