

# Study focuses on cancer screening rates among Asian-American women

By Maileen Hamto  
The Asian Reporter

When compared to Caucasians, Asian-American women have significantly higher incidence and death rates for cervical and breast cancer. Not coincidentally, cancer screening rates are lower for Asian-American women when compared to other ethnic groups.

Frances Lee-Lin, a researcher and assistant professor at Oregon Health & Science University, recently completed a study that focused on cancer screening rates among Chinese-American immigrant women in Portland. Her goal? To better understand her subjects' knowledge and beliefs about mammograms and Pap smears in an effort to lay the groundwork for more effective ways to communicate the importance of regular cancer screenings.

Early detection of breast and cervical cancers through regular mammography and Pap smears makes it possible for health-care providers to diagnose cancer before it starts to cause symptoms. According to the American Cancer Society, finding cancers as early as possible improves the likelihood that treatment will be successful.

"Asian-American women have low screening rates and are often diagnosed at later stages of the disease. They also are generally afraid to talk about cancer," said Lee-Lin, an assistant professor at the OHSU School of Nursing. She recently earned a Ph.D. degree in nursing at the University of Utah, focusing on oncology.

Her study — funded by a two-year grant from the American Cancer Society — builds on her previous research that focused on the informational needs of recently diagnosed Chinese-American cancer patients.

In recent years, Americans have become more knowledgeable and open about discussing breast and cervical cancers, thanks to growing awareness about the



**TALKING ABOUT CANCER.** Frances Lee-Lin, a researcher and assistant professor at Oregon Health & Science University, recently completed a study that focused on cancer screening rates among Chinese-American immigrant women in Portland. (AR Photo/Maileen Hamto)

diseases. The increasing number of cancer survivors who are willing to talk about cancer has helped increase knowledge about the importance of screening, prevention, and modes of treatment.

"Among Asian Americans — especially older people or those who have it — people don't want to talk about cancer. Cancer means death, so people don't talk about it and many may not know that there are survivors within our community," Lee-Lin says.

Lee-Lin's study included 100 Chinese-American immigrant women in the Portland area — ranging in age from 40 to 91 — who completed a written survey. Respondents had immigrated to the U.S. as early as age nine and as late as age 70, with the mean age of immigration being 38.8.

Recent immigrants, as well as women who have spent most of their adult lives in the U.S., completed the survey. Some survey participants had lived in the U.S.

for as little as one month, others as long as 43 years, with the average length of U.S. residence at 17.5 years.

Respondents were given the choice to complete the survey in English or Mandarin, the latter available in simplified or traditional Chinese. Only seven percent of respondents chose to fill out the survey in English. About 48 percent of those who completed the survey said they had either a college or graduate degree, while 18 percent had elementary level or no formal education.

Some 47 percent reported earning less than \$30,000, while 26 percent earned more than \$100,000. Twenty-three percent did not report their income. "Those who did not report their income were also less likely to have had a recent mammography. This could be related to a health-insurance issue," Lee-Lin says.

Thirteen percent of respondents reported that they had no health insurance, while 77 percent had a regular

health-care provider. Of these respondents, about 57 percent reported having a female health-care provider, while 76 percent said that their provider is non-Asian. "Health insurance is very important, because that means that you have a regular health-care provider and having him/her tell you that you need to do regular screening," Lee-Lin said.

Previous studies have shown that women with immediate family members who have had breast cancer tend to have higher mammography screening rates. Some 72 percent of respondents indicated that they have close relatives with breast cancer.

However, only 36 percent responded that they knew someone with cervical cancer. This finding is interesting, considering the incidence and death rates of cervical cancer are higher among Asian women than whites. "Cervical cancer is not a disease that people feel comfortable talking about," Lee-Lin said.

About 26 percent knew that being overweight increased their risk for breast cancer, and only 36 percent knew that breast cancer risk increases with age.

While 86 percent of survey respondents indicated that they have had a mammogram, only 48.5 percent had the screening done within the past year. It is recommended that women age 40 and above have annual mammograms, Lee-Lin said.

Some 84 percent reported they'd had a Pap smear, but only 68 percent had the screening completed within the past year. "Having a mammography or Pap smear done once is not going to save your life. The concept that needs to be communicated to the Asian community is that you need regular adherence to the screening guidelines for breast and cervical cancers," said Lee-Lin.

Respondents who have a high barrier score also were less likely to have regular mammograms and Pap smears. The six "barriers" that prevented women from hav-

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## Nominations sought for Marshall Leadership Award

The Marshall Leadership Award Committee is seeking nominations for the 18th annual General George C. Marshall Public Leadership Award, presented by the Bank of Clark County (Wash.). The annual award is one of many Celebrate Freedom programs organized by the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust.

Nominees must be Clark County residents, 35 years of age or under, and have completed a four-year college degree. Selection is based on demonstrated leadership ability, commitment to public service, academic achievement, and potential for an ongoing active role in public service.

U.S. General George C. Marshall lived in Vancouver from 1936 to 1938 and served as Commander of the

Vancouver Barracks. He went on to serve as the nation's Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense during World War II. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the Marshall Plan, which helped rebuild the economies of Europe and the Pacific nations after the war.

Nominations can be submitted by individuals or organizations and are due by 5:00pm on September 21, 2006. Nomination forms are available at the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust's website at <www.vnhrt.org> and at the Trust's offices at Gen. O.O. Howard House, 750 Anderson St., Vancouver, Washington.

## PPS expands Asian language programs

Returning Portland Public Schools (PPS) students will find more language learning opportunities this fall.

Woodstock Elementary is doubling the size of the PPS Mandarin Chinese immersion program by adding another kindergarten classroom. Richmond Elementary is adding a third Japanese immersion kindergarten, and for the first time will offer a Japanese pre-kindergarten class at the school. Language immersion programs are in high demand from families in Portland Public Schools, which is internationally known for its immersion success.

Also this fall, Lent and Bridger elementary schools in outer Southeast Portland are starting dual immersion Spanish kindergartens. Rigler Elementary's Spanish immersion program, which started in 2006, is growing one grade level per year. To learn more, visit <www.pps.k12.or.us>.

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- Scholarships cover tuition, fees, and textbooks for a seven-month, full-time advanced professional English program and a living stipend.
- Scholarship recipients agree to work for the federal government for one year. The National Security Education Program will provide initial help to participants in their search for a job in or outside of the Seattle area.

Coursework will be provided by the University of Washington English Language Programs, February 12-August 17, 2007.

For more details about the Heritage Program:

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