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IACAN Addresses the Role of Diet and Complementary Medicine in Cancer

BY KALYANI GIRI

HOUSTON: The west is finally wising up to what the east has long known, that adding a little spice to your diet can add years to your life. Clinical studies of recent years have research scientists excited about curcumin, the source of the spice turmeric, which is a member of the *curcuma longa* botanical group. Curcumin is a powerful antioxidant with anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic, and antimicrobial properties.

“Through Ayurveda and traditional scientific knowledge, India has benefited from the healing qualities of spices we use in our foods such as turmeric. Chronic inflammation causes heart disease, cancer, Alzheimers and many other ailments. Curcumin inhibits the NF – kB (nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells) linked to chronic disease,” said Dr. Bharat Aggarwal, a scientist at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Dr. Aggarwal was one of four distinguished speakers at a community outreach event hosted by the Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN) at the India House on May 23. The volunteer organization’s mission is to provide a diverse resource network that will address the distinct cultural and psychosocial needs of people of South Asian descent affected by cancer. The program, *The Role of Diet and Complementary Medicine in Cancer*, was the second in a series of cancer-relevant educational seminars that IACAN has hosted since inception in August 2009.

“Cancer is a preventable disease that requires a major change in lifestyle. Fifty percent of cancers are caused by tobacco, 7% because of pollution and radiation, and 5% through the genes. Patients suffering from the fatigue, depression, and sleeplessness are being treated with curcumin



Board Members of IACAN and expert guest panelists. From Left: Pallavi Mehta, Dr. Sunil Krishnan, Dr. Parameswaran, Dr Bharat Aggarwal, Neeta Pahwa, Dr. Beverly Gor, Alpa Shah, Dr. Anu Rao and Mitali Paul. Photo: Kalapi Sheth.

with positive results,” said Dr. Aggarwal of a clinical study that the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center is conducting. He is the co-editor of the book *Molecular Targets and Therapeutic Uses for Spices – Modern Uses for Ancient Medicines*.

Serving as moderator for the afternoon was Dr. Anu Rao, Secretary of IACAN.

Dr. P.G. Parameswaran, a thoracic and general surgeon, is a diehard believer in holistic medicine and the healing power of alternative techniques. He also practices acupuncture, hypnotherapy, yoga therapy and energy medicine. Dr. Parameswaran, the IACAN Joint-Secretary, spoke about *Alternative and Complementary Therapies* for cancer patients. While he touted non-traditional treatments, he cautioned that a holistic approach be adopted along with mainstream allopathic therapy.

“Complementary treatments such as acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, breathing exercises, help stimulate the body’s natural healing, helps the blood flow and tissue repair, and reboots the autonomic system. It restores a sense of control and vitality,” said Dr. Parameswaran. “Acupuncture helps treat nausea, dry

mouth, and other side effects associated with chemotherapy.”

Hypnosis is beneficial as the subconscious mind becomes active and receptive to suggestion, particularly in helping quell anxiety in the wake of a dire diagnosis, added Dr. Parameswaran. Yoga promotes flexibility and well being, while meditation helps lower mood disturbances and pain.

Colorful foods are higher in nutrients, said Dr. Beverly Gor, another erudite panelist for the event and Program Director of Community Relations for the Center for Research on Minority Health (CRMH) at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. She spoke of various foods and their healthful benefits; fresh ginger root is a powerful antioxidant that helps cleanse the colon. The active ingredient in garlic is allicin, which enhances the immune system and protects the body against infection. Insoluble fiber like wheat bran, brown rice, vegetable and fruit skins and peels prevents constipation, while soluble fibers such as oats, blackeyed peas, and beans lowers cholesterol and slows the rise of blood sugar.

“Stop smoking, maintain suitable

weight, limit smoked or salt cured food, eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains, limit fatty foods, and limit alcohol intake,” suggested Dr. Gor, to help prevent cancer.

Neeta Pahwa, diet specialist at the St. Lukes Episcopal Hospital, offered ways of incorporating more vegetables into everyday traditional Indian dishes. She advocated eight servings of fruit and vegetables per day. “Add vegetables to whole wheat *roti*, *atta*, *rice*, *dhal*, and *upma*. Eat a high fiber diet by washing veggies thoroughly and cooking them with skins. Use the stems for chutneys. Throw in a handful of almonds in oatmeal, along with dry fruits. Have veggie smoothies for a snack,” Pahwa told gatherers. She also had creative recipes for soybeans and soy products.

Following the discussions, guests got to ask questions that ran the gamut from whether coconut was considered harmful to the health, and to which website offered the purest form of curcumin for sale. The knowledgeable panelists answered patiently, making for a very successful and educative afternoon. For more information visit <http://www.iacannetwork.org>.