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LARRY YANG is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center with a master's degree in Law and practices before California State Courts, United States District Courts, the California Appeals for the 9th Circuit and U.S. Bankruptcy Courts.

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## More education needed to prevent HIV/AIDS infection in women

by RENE VILLAROMAN  
AJPress

LONG BEACH—"There is nothing crueler than getting a disease that's totally preventable," declared Judy Chu, Ph.D., and vice chair of the California Board of Equalization during the National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Long Beach last week.

"We know that HIV/AIDS, with the proper kind of measures, that it does not have to happen. But it will happen if there is no education, or if there is ignorance," Dr. Chu added.

The symposium was put together by the 22-year-old Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team (APAIT) headed by Executive Director Jury Candelario. "I would say that the incidence of HIV/AIDS is going up," notes Candelario, who has been at the helm of the non-profit APAIT since 2002. "The trend is that (HIV) is no longer a stand-alone disease, and APAIT is approaching the disease now based on environmental trends and surrounding co-factors," Candelario explained.

The other issue facing the fight against the infection is viral hepatitis which infects many Asians, as well as the prevalence of Hepatitis B. "In partnership with HIV,



Lian Chu and Jury Candelario (from left) of APAIT, with Dr. Judy Chu and Fiona Ao, panelists. AJPress Photo by Rene Villaroman

Hepatitis B is a very dangerous combination. You think that HIV is dangerous, combine that with Hepatitis B and one would face the possibility of liver cancer and cirrhosis issues," Candelario notes.

Early in the epidemic, HIV infection and AIDS were diagnosed for relatively few women and female adolescents, according to a study made by the Center for Disease Control. Today, women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. Women of color are especially affected by HIV infection and AIDS. In 2004, the most recent year for which data are available, HIV infection was the leading cause of death for black women aged 24-34 years, according to the CDC study. HIV and AIDS are also the fourth leading cause of death for Hispanic women aged 35-54 years.

The CDC study stated that of the more than 19,500 patients with HIV in 10 US cities, women were slightly less likely than men to receive prescriptions for the most effective treatments for HIV infection.

"Part of the challenge that we are facing right now, especially in the Asian Pacific Islander communities, is silence and invisibility," according to a study conducted by Dr. Rosemary Veniegas, Ph.D. and assistant research psychologist at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

"Recent experiences I had this year was trying to help someone get a confirmatory testing for a

preliminary HIV test, and I called an agency and got the phone run-around," attests Dr. Veniegas. "It is not right that one in seven women have not heard about STD (sexually transmitted Diseases) and HIV. It's also not right that we find people in the emergency room with pneumonia, and their TC count lower than 240."

She said that in this day and age, when HIV is a chronic condition fully treatable by medical professionals, the rate of infection is still rising. "So let's not remain silent and invisible. As women, we should be able to talk to our mothers, sisters, spouses, partners, and our communities about HIV and AIDS," Veniegas advised.

"I am here as part of our political system," declared Dr. Chu, who is running in the 22nd congressional district of California for a seat in the US Congress. "I certainly have taken a great interest working on this issue as an assembly member in the State Assembly where I did legislation making it easier for AIDS patients to receive medications through the MediCal program," she said. Dr. Chu believes that there should be more education programs among the Asian Pacific Islanders communities to let everyone know that HIV infection is preventable.

"I hope that if I do indeed make it to Congress, that we will have more funds for preventable diseases like these that affect our communities. I am making that pledge to you that I will indeed do a lot to make that happen."

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