

Dr. Eduardo Lim

Top Fil-Am cancer doctor

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO / AJPress

Cure for the body, care for the heart and mind

WHILE health care specialists labor toward curing cancer (which causes 13 percent of all human deaths, according to a 2006 World Health Organization report), the vital thing that would have a greater impact on the lives of cancer patients and their families is supportive mental and emotional therapy, expressed through love and care. One health care specialist who strives to give both to his cancer patients—cure and care—is oncologist and hematologist, Dr. Eduardo Lim. One of only two Filipino-American oncologists in the whole of Southern California, Dr. Lim is an outstanding physician who understands that cancer often brings with it a host of distressing symptoms such as anxiety, fear and depression. Providing adequate relief from such distress, however, is not the norm among health care providers, says a new report from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's National Cancer Policy Board. But Dr. Lim had made it his life's mission to provide "TLC—tender loving care" to all his patients, knowing it will greatly affect not only the treatment of their disease but vastly improve the quality of their day-to-day lives and the chances for remission and life extension.

Born in Cavite on April 1, 1957, Dr. Eduardo Lim is a magna cum laude graduate from the University of the Philippines, where he took up Medicine. He came to the United States in 1984 for further training at the Cook County Hospital in Chicago. After his residency at Cook County, Lim got an offer to work in West Virginia. After a few years, he went back to Chicago where he stayed for six years. In 2002, the Fil-Am oncologist decided to pack up his bags and leave Chicago to move to Los Angeles. "The weather in Chicago was so depressing—always gray... you hardly see the sun. So, I moved to sunny California," explained the cheery doctor. "Besides, my only relatives in the US live here in the West—an aunt in Eagle Rock and an uncle in Las Vegas," added Lim.

The second of 8 children, Lim admits that his parents influenced him to be a doctor, but it is a mentor in Chicago, a lady oncologist who inspired him to be a cancer doctor. "She was so compassionate with cancer patients, knowing they need a lot of tender loving care. And I felt I can do that too. I saw doctors who are quite cold with their patients. But, I'm a

people person. I can connect with people. I'm very positive and warm, very responsive. So, I thought, oncology is one field where I can give back to the Lord. I'm a very happy person and I try to impart positive energy and attitude to my patients, which is what they direly need," explained Lim with a happy smile.

Now on his 18th year as an oncologist, Dr. Lim is one of the top cancer doctors in St. Vincent's Medical Center and several other hospitals in LA. Almost half of his patients are

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Filipinos, who come to his St. Vincent's clinic in LA from as far as Palm Springs and San Diego.

"As an oncologist, you have to love what you're doing and know that you can give joy to the people you are serving. I'm a giver and I believe my patients give a lot to me in return. You have to take time to explain everything well to your patients. They are fearful, not

knowing what will happen. So, I explain the whole scenario and why they need the treatment. If I have to hold their hands to alleviate their fears and make them feel comfortable, I do. Sometimes, they need a hug or they just want someone who is willing to listen as they vent. I treat patients how they want to be treated. Like more TLC or more toughness. When some patients don't want treatment, I do my best to convince them. I say, if you're my sister, I will be dragging you to the treatment so you can get cured. I will be

with you all the way. A lot of the patients—95 percent or more—I'm able to convince them to do what's right for them. So what they need, I give them that. If that patient needed extra time from me, I will give that to him or her. Sometimes that patient needs extra time to talk. So I listen to them vent out their complaints. It may be a problem or difficulty totally



unrelated to the disease. Still, I try to counsel. So I become like a counselor, a social worker, a friend, not just a doctor. I try to be extra nice and patient, to do more for them," said Lim.

"The biggest joy of my practice is when patients acknowledge my importance in their lives, when they treat me like a family member. It is most rewarding when patients express their thanks to me and give me a hug and tell me that they love

me. One patient who has breast cancer told me—"I'm alive because of you. God found you for me." Things like that make it all worthwhile," Lim shared.

Compared to cancer treatment 10-20 years ago, Lim stated that there have been major breakthroughs. "Around 10 years ago, 20 to 30 percent of treatments are successful. Today, it is around 50 percent successful. And there are very new drugs within the last 10



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years for breast cancer like Avastin and Herceptin. We have passed 52 percent cure. I think genetic engineering is how we will get rid of cancer. Genetic engineering is advancing in by leaps and bounds. In breast cancer, 95 percent of early stage cancer or stage 1 are treated successfully," Lim said. "But, we're still far advanced in treatments and equipment here in the States than in the Philippines," added Lim.

Lim shared that many Filipinos have to be educated more on the disease so he gives lectures in many Fil-Am communities, designed specifically for

Filipinos. "Many Filipinos are nahihiya, nataakot. They're praying it will just go away. But early detection is so important. That's why, here in SVMC, we have free detection programs," he said.

Lim admits that his work is his life. Waking up at 3 to 4am to do his personal stuff, like answer and write emails, he then heads off to the gym for exercise. By 6:30am, he is already doing his rounds. Then, he treats patients from 9 to 5pm. After that, more rounds until dinnertime. By 10pm he is home and ready for bed.

"My life is my work. Everyday

I wake up to serve God and see my patients. I have devoted my life to my work. I enjoy it so much. It's a vocation," he said. The doctor goes home once a year to visit his family. "I have a home in the Philippines. When I retire, maybe I will split my time there and here. Southern California is my home but Manila is where my family is so that's also where I plan to be part of the time."

Since cancer is a terminal disease, many have asked Lim if he feels depressed dealing with patients. He said, "You know, cancer is a depressing subject. But, we have to make life happy. I never look or feel sad when I am with patients. I don't want to invite depression. That's why in our clinic, we maintain a happy atmosphere," said Lim.

"Of course, not everything works out well. But, I want patients to know we always do our best. I believe in life after death so I believe I don't really lose patients; I lose them to God. If their time is near, we take care of them very well to have a smooth, comfortable transition. It's not an end, it's moving on to be with the Lord." ■

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