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## Heart health campaign to benefit South Asian community

EDMONTON — The city's South Asian community will benefit from better knowledge of heart disease as the CK Hui Heart Centre at the Royal Alexandra Hospital expands its Multicultural Heart Health Awareness Program this year.

First launched for Edmonton's Chinese community in 2009, this Alberta Health Services (AHS) program — then the first of its kind in Canada — reached out to young and old alike through community events, health fairs, public lectures, school visits and contests, and radio and print promotion with information that raised awareness of heart health and how to prevent heart disease.

"It's a very comprehensive program and it's still ongoing," says Dr. William Hui, Chief of Cardiology at the Royal Alex. "We'll continue to serve the Chinese community and expand into the South Asian community, which is one of the highest-risk groups. That's why they're targeted in our second campaign."

Currently estimated at 50,000 people, Edmonton's growing South Asian community is now believed to be the city's largest ethnic group, slightly larger than the Chinese community. People of South Asian heritage develop severe heart disease 10 years earlier, on average, than the Caucasian population, for reasons that remain under investigation, adds Dr. Hui.

"A lot of the time, when they settle in Canada, they work very hard and they don't watch their heart health," says Dr. Po Kee Cheung, lead cardiologist for the Multicultural Heart Health Awareness Program. "As well, their diet is changing; sometimes this increases the likelihood of heart attack or heart disease. That's why it's important to let them know, for example, what to do when you have a heart attack — and how to prevent them through a healthier lifestyle."

South Asian countries include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

"We're thrilled with the success of the first phase of the Multicultural Heart Health Awareness Program," says Anne McLellan, Chair of the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, which raised \$250,000 for the cause. "This informative endeavour is just one of the many innovations we're seeing from the cardiology staff at the CK Hui Heart Centre and the foundation is happy to support such a beneficial project."

Sharing information to prevent and manage chronic diseases, such as heart disease, is among the goals outlined in the 5-Year Health Action Plan, jointly developed by the Government of Alberta and AHS, and supported by the province's stable, 5-year funding.

Dr. Sudheer Sharma will play a leadership role in the South Asian Heart Health Initiative as it enlists the support of cardiologists across Edmonton Zone. Health professionals will work alongside South Asian community leaders and organizations to get the word out on the importance of exercise, a heart-healthy diet and not smoking.

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“We’re very excited about the South Asian Heart Health Initiative,” says Dr. Sharma. “Currently there is no formal public awareness program in Alberta dedicated to raising awareness of cardiovascular disease and stroke among the South Asian community, so this endeavour is an important step in both education and prevention.”

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT and Nunavut is also a partner in this initiative.

“Research has shown that people of South Asian descent have a three- to five-fold increase in risk of heart attack and death from cardiovascular disease compared to other groups,” says Kate Chidester, VP of Health and Research for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT and Nunavut. “The Heart and Stroke Foundation has developed South Asian health promotion resources that are translated and culturally adapted to Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Tamil. We look forward to working with this initiative to promote healthy lifestyle choices and increase awareness of the risks and warning signs of cardiovascular disease.”

A local cardiac patient says he supports the new campaign.

“The care I received at the CK Hui Heart Centre was phenomenal,” says Dharam Singh Dhabgotra, 69, who received a stent to improve his blood flow. “I was very impressed with everyone who was involved with my care. I know that the cardiology team at the Royal Alex has a long history of innovative patient care, and to know that they are taking that innovative approach into our community with the South Asian Heart Health Initiative is even more impressive.”

Dr. Hui points out the program’s success can’t be judged or measured in the short-term.

“Ultimately, we will need to look at vital statistics down the road and compare them to historical data. After we’ve done this for five years, we’ll ask ourselves: ‘Can we see any difference or trend in heart health statistics for this community?’ ” he says.

“But I’m confident this program is making a difference in the heart health of our city. As cardiologists treating heart disease, even with all the wonderful tools that we have — balloons, stents, pacemakers — we can only help one patient at a time. Yet when we promote heart health awareness and healthy lifestyles, we help the whole population.”

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Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

The Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation, as a respected fundraising leader, inspires community support for the Royal Alexandra Hospital and its Centres of Excellence including the Lois Hole Hospital for Women, the CK Hui Heart Centre, the Regional Eye Centre and the Orthopedic Surgery Centre. The Foundation empowers compassionate and innovative patient care through leading-edge education, research, technology and facility enhancements.