

**Shri Krishna Nidhi (SKN) Foundation & SATHI Celebration of Life Event
September 24, 2010**

Introduction

Thank you to the SKN Foundation and SATHI for putting together this creative event that will bring greater awareness about Cancer prevention to the South Asian community.

SATHI has a very special place in my heart, so it brings me great joy to be here with my friends and colleagues again. SATHI helped me kickoff Minority and Multicultural Month so it is very fitting I am here to close out the month with them. At that kickoff event we were also joined by the Satrangi School of Dance and their inspirational director Rohit Baxi. This group was incredible at our kickoff and I am sure their performance tonight will be just as special.

Minority & Multicultural Health Month

Throughout this month, Colette Lamothe-Galette, the Acting Director of the Office of Minority and Multicultural Health, and I been traveling around the state to health fairs and cultural festivals to raise awareness of health issues that disproportionately affect minorities and to highlight the key steps residents can take to protect their health. Approximately 50 community based-organizations and healthcare agencies held events across the state to educate and inform New Jerseyans about leading a healthier life.

One of my visions is that we won't need a month to focus on minority health issues. My hope is that we will close the gap on disparities in health care and that patients will receive sensitive and compassionate care without the need to take their race and ethnicity into account. Until that time, our Department and our community partners must work day and night to eliminate barriers to health care and develop solutions to ensure health equity for all our residents.

As I mentioned, I started the month off with SATHI in New Brunswick, but throughout the month I have been traveling. During September, I had the pleasure of attending health fairs in Trenton, East Orange and North Bergen. I was very pleased to see so many people taking care of their health by taking advantage of these health screenings. Last Sunday, thousands of Latinas attended the Save Latin America fair in North Bergen and were screened for some 23 diseases and health issues and they were also able to get follow-up care in area hospitals.

Our slogan for Minority & Multicultural Health month is *Healthy Me, Healthy Us*, which encourages residents – those of all cultural backgrounds, from the youngest to the oldest – to actively participate in their own health, and in the health of their families and communities. It was heartening to see so many New Jerseyans--young and old—taking steps to a healthier lifestyle.

Health Screening Data

An important part of a healthy lifestyle is receiving preventive care like health screenings.

Unfortunately when we speak about the Asian community, our screening rates are the lowest compared to all ethnic groups.

- Breast Cancer screening rates are lower among Asian women when compared with American women. The screening rate for Asian women is 54% compared to 69% among White women. (2008 BRFSS)
- Cervical Cancer screening rates are lower among Asian women compared to White women (66% vs. 81%, respectively). 2008 BRFSS
- Prostate Cancer screening rates are lower among Asian men compared to White men (31% vs. 57%, respectively). 2008 BRFSS

We clearly need to do a better job educating the Asian community about how important screenings are to their overall health. We need to emphasize the importance of preventive care.

Preventive care, like health screenings, truly save lives.

DHSS Cancer Efforts

We know that one of the best ways to fight cancer is through early detection, screening, education and awareness and all New Jerseyans deserve access to these tools to protect them from cancer.

However, we know many residents are uninsured or underinsured and that can limit access to screenings—and consequently, chances of survival. Low-income men and women who have inadequate or no health insurance coverage are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at later stages, when survival times are shorter.

To address disparities in care, the New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJCEED) Program provides comprehensive outreach, education and screening services for breast, cervical, colorectal and prostate cancers for low-income, uninsured and underinsured residents in 21 counties. Governor Christie understands how important this service is to the community and ensured that the program was supported in this year's budget. Thanks to the Department's NJCEED program, more than 200,000 residents have been screened for breast, cervical, prostate and colorectal cancer since 2000. These screenings have resulted in 1,507 breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal cancer diagnoses since 2000.

That is more than 1,000 people who were diagnosed and able to receive care. Think about that—without this program, 1,000 people may have skipped lifesaving screenings because they couldn't pay for them.

The Department of Health and Senior Services is also working on an overall effort to reduce the burden of cancer for all New Jersey residents through the *NJ Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan* (2008–2012).

The Office of Cancer Control works with the Governor's Task Force on Cancer Prevention & Early Detection, the CDC and the 21 county cancer coalitions to raise awareness, increase screening rates, promote prevention and address cancer issues in our state. As part of its work, the Office of Cancer Control also strives to address quality of life issues such as coordination of care, patient-provider communication, palliative care, pain management, and fertility preservation.

All of this work is focused on helping residents reduce their cancer risk by getting regular screenings, maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet, getting regular exercise and eliminating tobacco use and excessive use of alcohol.

Cancer remains a major public health challenge both for our state & nation. Cancer can affect anyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender or economic status.

The burden of cancer has touched all of our lives.

Unfortunately, cancer takes the lives of 16,000 of our loved ones, friends and neighbors in this state each year.

Cancer Statistics

From 2003-2007, more than 230,000 cases of invasive cancer were diagnosed among New Jersey residents.

The burden of cancer is not distributed evenly throughout all populations.

There are significant disparities:

- Liver, stomach and oral Cancer deaths are slightly higher among foreign-born Asians compared to those US-born.
- The Breast cancer death rate is more than 25% higher among Black women when compared to white women
- Cervical cancer death rate is more than two times higher among black women & the incidence rate among Blacks and Hispanics is about twice the rate of whites
- Black male death rates from Prostate Cancer are 12% higher than white residents.

The good news is that we've made great strides over the years in promoting screenings, addressing cancer and improving survival rates.

Due to advances in the early detection and treatment of cancer, people are living years after diagnosis. Tens of thousands people become cancer survivors each year.

Currently, there are more than 11 million cancer survivors living in the US. That number is 3 times the number alive 30 years ago.

Closing

Events like today's can only help us increase the number of people who survive cancer. We need to encourage more residents to get screened, because we know early detection is our best tool in treating cancer.

So I want to thank SATHI and SKN Foundation for putting together this event and bringing education and awareness to the South Asian community.

Working together we can increase screening rates and protect the health of all New Jerseyans.