

Fighting For the Cure

July 28 is World Hepatitis Day, one of only eight official World Health Organization observances mandated by the World Health Assembly. Hepatitis B afflicts 240 million people worldwide. That's 10 times the number impacted by HIV/AIDS.

The Asian Liver Center (ALC) at Stanford University is dedicated to spearheading national and global efforts towards the elimination of viral hepatitis by addressing the gaps in awareness, training, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and national policies. Recent data from the World Health Organization shows that more people die each year in the world from viral hepatitis than HIV, malaria, or TB. Most die from liver cancer and liver cirrhosis caused by chronic hepatitis B or C. Yet viral hepatitis has largely been ignored as a global health problem. The ALC is working to change this. As Executive Director Dr. Sam So explains, "Chronic hepatitis B can be eliminated through vaccination, and those infected could be

Building Awareness

treated with a pill-a-day. Most chronic hepatitis C patients could be cured with a 3-month course of treatment. Together, we can do better."

Born in Hong Kong, Dr. So came to Stanford as a transplant surgeon who treated patients with hepatitis B and liver cancer. When asked why he was driven to found the ALC in 1996, he said passionately, "We have had a safe, effective vaccine for 30 years, yet we are not implementing an effective screening and vaccination program worldwide to eradicate hepatitis B. It is a vexing issue in modern medicine: the giant gap between discovery and implementation."

Since then, Dr. So and his team have established programs in the U.S. and China to help control and manage this global health threat, including programs in mother-to-child transmission, youth leadership, and initiatives to build the capacity of governments in China, Laos, Mongolia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. In November 2014, the ALC moved to its permanent home near Stanford Hospital, thanks to a generous donation from Honorary Founder Dr. Chang Jen Huang (1916 – 2012). The new building, which

bears his name, is supporting the ALC and other critical clinical and translational research in cancer, dermatology, neurology, pediatrics, psychiatry, medicine, and cardiothoracic surgery.

"ALC's new space is also allowing for the growth of its three-year-old corporate outreach program, which provides free consultation and educational resources to employers worldwide. San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties have the highest rates of liver cancer in the United States due to their large Asian populations," notes Dr. So. Clearly, the need exists and the corporate philanthropic world is listening. Global partners, to date, include IBM, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, and Microsoft. Last summer, over 157,000 employees were educated about risk and prevention at one of Foxconn Corporation's manufacturing sites. ♦ —CORRINE E. MEHIGAN

For information and involvement at both the individual or corporate level, contact the Asian Liver Center mienas@stanford.edu or <http://med.stanford.edu/yucorps>



Quick Facts About Viral Hepatitis

- Hepatitis B is the leading cause of liver cancer worldwide. There is no cure, but there is a vaccination to prevent the disease and a treatment for those who are chronically infected.
- 70% of the 240 million global cases of hepatitis B are in Asia.
- San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties have the first and third highest rates of liver cancer in the nation, due to our foreign-born populations suffering from this preventable disease. Most Asians were infected at birth without knowing it.
- In the U.S., vaccination is a covered, preventive service without cost sharing.
- On May 27, 2015, hepatitis B testing became eligible for coverage under the ACA for those who are foreign-born or have foreign-born parents, without cost sharing.

