

## St. Vincent Medical Center Nurse Practitioner Receives California Hepatitis Alliance Award

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Nurse Practitioner Mimi Chang, who has helped develop the Asian Pacific Liver Center (APLC) at St. Vincent Medical Center in Los Angeles, California received the Sherri Ziegler Community Service Award as a leader in viral hepatitis education and advocacy at a ceremony in Sacramento on May 23, 2012.

The award was given by the California Hepatitis Alliance (CalHEP) and recognizes Mimi's efforts for assisting thousands of people affected by chronic hepatitis B (CHB) disease. Nominations for the award came from the community and were voted upon by the CalHEP Steering Committee.

Mimi's efforts go beyond her work at the APLC; she also serves as co-chair of Hep B Free Los Angeles, an organization that increases awareness about chronic (lifelong) hepatitis B and offers patient education. The orga-

nization has locations in Orange County and Long Beach.

"This award was earned by our entire APLC team of physicians, staff and volunteer nurses and student volunteers who have gone with me into the communities affected by chronic hepatitis B," said Mimi Chang. "We have screened and educated nearly 15,000 people in the communities at high risk for hepatitis B -- in Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Cambodian neighborhoods. We have vaccinated thousands. And our hepatologists

Ho Bae, MD and Tse-Ling Fong, MD provide ongoing care for people who are already affected by the virus."

The Asian Pacific Liver Center opened as a hospital clinic and research center at St. Vincent Medical Center in 2007 and has since become the primary hepatitis B research and outreach center in metropolitan Los Angeles. The outreach began when the APLC started reaching out to churches in Asian communities in the Los Angeles area, asking for a few minutes after sermons to discuss hepatitis B risks and screenings.

More than half of the approximately 2 million known hepatitis B carriers in the United States are Asian and Pacific Islanders. When left untreated, the virus leads to cirrhosis—scarring of the liver that can result in liver failure (one in four individuals with liver scarring progress to liver failure); and may also lead to liver cancer. According to the



***Mimi Chang at the Asian Pacific Liver Center Office***

Hepatitis B Foundation, an estimated 550,000 people worldwide die of liver cancer each year and 80 percent of all liver cancer in the world is caused by chronic hepatitis B infection.

The APLC outreach program is designed to educate people about the dangers of hepatitis and liver disease and the steps they can take to protect themselves. Medical experts speak to large community groups and coordinate large-scale testing. Twice a month, the APLC provides free screenings for large groups and mails each patient's results to his or her home.

APLC is currently involved in research projects that test the efficacy of different antiviral therapies and other research into bone mineral density and other health conditions of people with CHB.

Identifying hepatitis B is difficult,

because it is asymptomatic. Once a person starts exhibiting symptoms, there has been liver damage. Through education and vaccination, the APLC strives to stop the progression of CHB disease. Due to campaigns to raise awareness in the last 20 years, the prevalence of CHB has decreased dramatically. Education and prevention initiatives have been able to reduce the number of children who will develop CHB. According to California guidelines, babies born to mothers affected by hepatitis B must be vaccinated within 12 hours of birth. The vaccine has been proven effective in reducing transmission by 90 percent.

St. Vincent Medical Center President/CEO Cathy Fickes noted that Mimi has gone "above and beyond" as an advocate and healthcare practitioner. She said: "Mimi is most deserving of this award. She lives our values every day: provides compas-

sionate care, advocates for the underserved, shows respect for everyone, and finds inventive ways to get our mission accomplished."

The Asian Pacific Liver Center (APLC) provides comprehensive screening, vaccination, and preventive education for those at risk of developing hepatitis and provides innovative treatment and surveillance to those people with hepatitis and associated liver diseases. This approach to integrate education, research, and science has the potential to eradicate the disease within the community. The treatment or surveillance services are provided by a multi-disciplinary team in close collaboration with the individual patient's primary care physician. The Asian Pacific Liver Center (APLC) is located at St. Vincent Medical Center at 2200 W. 3rd St in Downtown Los Angeles. To learn more about the APLC, visit [www.asianpacificlivercenter.org](http://www.asianpacificlivercenter.org).

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