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The Birth of Korean American Cancer Control

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Korean Americans have entered a new era. This year, 2003, marks our first century of existence. In this centennial year, we honor the Koreans who first journeyed to Hawaii to begin a new life in a strange land as sugar cane workers. A newly released monograph, *“The Korean American Journey”* (Shim 2002), summarizes the story of the immigration and the growth and development of a new Korean American community (Chun and Goodenough, 1995). In this context, we now present the proceedings of the first national conference on Korean American cancer control, the Korean American Cancer Control Academy, held in Boston, June 14–15, 2002. The conference was sponsored by the Asian American Network for Cancer Awareness, Research and Training (AANCART), which is funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

This conference contributes to growing national efforts by public health leaders to eliminate health disparities among populations as a major goal for the 21st century. For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (API), public health attention escalated dramatically through the visionary leadership of Dr. Moon Chen. Dr. Chen founded (and has served as editor-in-chief of) the *Asian American and Pacific Islander Journal of Health* 1993, convened the first National Health Summit of API Leaders (1995), and led a groundbreaking national conference on API cancer control, *“Cancer Concerns for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders”* (1998). When the NCI initiated funding for the Special Populations Network to accelerate the elimination of cancer-related disparities, Dr. Chen led a national team of researchers whose goal was to reduce the unequal burden of cancer among Asian Americans. As a result, AANCART gained NCI funding and has since galvanized cancer control activities nationwide.

The Korean American Cancer Control Academy arose from a joint collaboration of AANCART, the American Cancer Society, the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. As Commissioner of Public Health of Massachusetts and as the first Korean American health commissioner in our country, I had the distinct honor of presiding over much of the conference and lending my professional and personal support. I never dreamed that our country would ever generate the commitment or capability to coordinate such a historic conference.

It was important to begin the Academy by understanding health issues within the context of Korean American culture. It gave me great professional and personal pride to welcome Dr. Hesung Chun Koh as a keynote speaker. Dr. Hesung Chun Koh is Chair and President of East Rock Institute (ERI), an organization dedicated to the enhancement and deepening of cultural understanding between Eastern and Western societies through innovative approaches to research and teaching. Dr. Koh and her late husband, Ambassador Kwang Lim Koh, cofounded ERI in 1985 (and its predecessor organization, The Korea Institute, in 1956). Her comprehensive knowledge of Korean American cultural issues is unrivaled by anyone in the world. As part of her passionate leadership at ERI, Dr. Hesung Chun Koh founded (1984) and serves as editor of the *Korean and Korean American Studies Bulletin*. She continues to serve as an inspiration to me, her son, as well as to Koreans and Americans near and far.

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We are just beginning to understand the unique health challenges facing Korean Americans. A decade ago, Dr. Hesung Chun Koh and I attempted to assess the public health status of our population by publishing an article, "Health Issues in Korean Americans," in the inaugural year of the *Asian American and Pacific Islander Journal of Health* (Koh and Koh 1993). At the time, it was extremely difficult to identify any peer-reviewed research on the topic. In fact, the National Library of Medicine's Medline database listed only a single citation related to Korean American health.

The current edition of the *Korean and Korean American Studies Bulletin* now documents how far we have come in one short decade. It is extremely gratifying to see the wealth of knowledge generated by national researchers on the topic. In this monograph, we first present a series of welcoming remarks for the academy by Dr. Chen and NCI leaders, Frank Jackson and Dr. Ken Chu in Part I. Then in Part II, Dr. Hesung Chun Koh reviews the status of Korean American culture, emphasizing the heterogeneity in linguistic ability, acculturation status, and health beliefs. Following this, Dr. Frederick Li summarizes the status of cancer control research in Korean American populations, documenting and annotating the rapid growth of activity in just the past several years.

The remainder of the monograph probes more deeply into evolving cancer control issues for Korean Americans. Dr. C. Richard Hofstetter and Jooeun Lee and Drs. Annette Maxwell and Howin Song address a range of issues regarding risk factors and screening practices for cancer in Korean Americans. Then specific cancer issues are addressed by Dr. Frederick Kviz and colleagues (tobacco addiction), Dr. Karen Kim (gastric cancer), and Dr. Soo Kyung Lee (fruit and vegetable consumption). All the authors emphasize the importance of gathering data both in Korean and in English. In particular, Ms. Sue Choi addresses the methodology by which accurate cancer related information can be obtained in both languages. The monograph concludes with an inspiring presentation by a Korean American cancer pioneer, Dr. Waun Ki Hong.

In short, we can now celebrate the birth of Korean American cancer control. We hope that this monograph contributes to a healthier Korean American population and a healthier United States in the future. We also offer our work in honor of those Koreans who made extraordinary personal sacrifices in order to start a new life in this country, convinced that there would be a better future for their families and the generations that would succeed them.

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