

Be Active

Eat Smart

Don't Smoke

Get Checked

Live Joyously

Office of Women's Health



Celebrating the Mind, Body, Spirit & Diversity of Women

Volume 3, Issue 1

Winter 2009

Interview with a Cardiologist

Yaga Szlachcic, M.D.

Inside this issue:

Women, Happiness and Public Health 2

Ask The Doctor: About heart disease and diabetes 2

Spotlight on our Community Partner: Tzu Chi Foundation 4

Update: Women's Health Policy Summit Implementation 7

OWH in Action 8



Dr. Yaga Szlachcic is on the cutting-edge of research on heart disease - the #1 killer of women - with vast research experience on women with disabilities. She is most notable for her research in hypertensive heart disease, ventricular arrhythmias in hypertension, congestive heart failure, premature atherosclerosis in patients with spinal cord injury, and in the health issues of women with spinal cord injury.

But Dr. Szlachcic is more than a researcher. Since 1996, she has served as Chief of Cardiology at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center where she plans to develop a center for health that provides policy-making and advocacy for disabled women. Dr. Szlachcic is also an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at USC where she lectures in hypertension, heart failure, and myocardial ischemia to medical students, interns, residents and fellows.

Working as a physician, researcher, and educator, Dr Szlachcic is making a significant difference in raising awareness of the health issues of disabled women, seeking improved methods of treatment, and providing quality care to patients in the aftermath of severely disabling illness and injury.

OWH Mission

To improve the health status of women in Los Angeles County by providing education and promoting resources, programs and policies that are helpful and responsive to women, and increasing access to culturally competent, comprehensive health services.

Dr. Szlachcic, you earned your medical degree from Warsaw Medical School. Did you grow up in Poland?

I was born in Poland. I completed my postgraduate education at the University Hospital of Warsaw Medical School and subsequently moved to Canada to pursue further postgraduate education in the Montreal Heart Institute.

When did you come to this country?

I came to California in 1982 with my husband who joined the faculty of UC San Francisco. I completed a research fellowship in the Cardiovascular Research Institute of UCSF and worked at the San Francisco Veteran's Association.

(continued on page 3)

Women, Happiness and Public Health

By Susan Nyanzi, DrPH, CHES, ACSM, Research Analyst, Office of Women's Health

Although currently we are facing hard times nationally and globally, in general the standard of living has increased as more women move into the workplace and many households are capable of meeting and sustaining basic necessities to live a comfortable and productive life.

With such needs met for women, does having everything "right", (a career and good home life) make you happy? And does happiness then have a set end point?



Happiness is associated with increased adoption of positive health behaviors.⁸

Effects of Income

Happiness is about the way you live, your view of the world and how much personal freedom you have in your environment, whether it's at home or work. Once basic needs are met, the effects of income on happiness get smaller and smaller.^{3, 4} Emory University researchers and others found that a year after winning the lottery, winners were no happier than controls⁵. They had reached an end set point based on the individual.

True long lasting happiness does not have a set point. Physiologically, people with happy temperaments exhibit high left prefrontal cortex activity, an area associated with happiness, joy and enthusiasm.^{3, 6, 8}

Dr. Richard Davidson, Director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin demonstrated in a study with Tibetan monks, that those engaged in compassion meditation had excessive left prefrontal cortex activity, showing that an increased level of happiness is strongly associated with being (Continued on p.5)

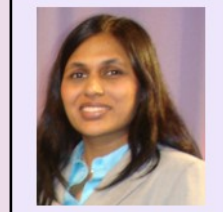
Ask The Doctor...

What can I do to prevent developing Diabetes and Heart Disease?

There is good evidence to suggest that **lifestyle factors** contribute significantly to the development of many chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer. These lifestyle factors include: **smoking, obesity, lack of physical activity, poor diet, and stress**. Unlike some risk factors such as age and family history which you can't change, lifestyle factors are modifiable.

A recent study showed that people who have **four positive health factors** (never smoked, not obese, performed 3.5 hours/week or more of physical activity and adhered to a healthy diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, whole grain bread and low meat consumption) had a **78% lower risk** of developing a chronic disease. A significant amount of risk reduction was achieved even for persons for whom only one to three of the four factors were present.¹

Therefore, the key steps that you can take to avoid developing chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease include: Don't smoke, maintain a healthy weight for your height, be physically active and adhere to a healthy diet. It is also important to get checked for conditions that can lead to heart disease such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. ♦



Rita Singhal, MD, MPH
OWH Medical Director

If you have a question for
Ask the Doctor,
please submit it to
jstjohn@ph.lacounty.gov

Interview with a Cardiologist *continued*

What drew you to specialize in cardiology and spinal cord injury in particular?

After moving to Los Angeles in 1990, I was on staff at USC and Rancho Los Amigos. The opportunity opened for both of us, my husband and I, at USC and Rancho Los Amigos, to apply our clinical and research knowledge and expertise. This is where I developed an interest and passion to serve the under-represented population and to study some unique medical issues seen in persons living with disabilities.

Who were your most inspiring mentors or collaborators?

I have been fortunate to work with several brilliant physicians who were my mentors. I want to name the late Dr. Edward Mongan, chair of Medicine at Rancho Los Amigos in the 1990s. Doctor Mongan's passion for improving medical knowledge in disabled patients was contagious. In San Francisco, it was Dr. Barry Massie who introduced me to research in hypertension and the prevention of cardiac disease.

Patients with disabilities and dedicated volunteers are current role models and inspiration.

Patients, particularly women at Rancho who despite significant physical disabilities are able to lead productive lives, are my current role models and inspiration. Also, the wonderful and giving volunteers - my research on the secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease in women with spinal cord injury would not be possible if we did not have such dedicated volunteers.

What kinds of challenges or advantages confront women with heart disease in Los Angeles County?

Women have been historically under-represented in research on heart disease and only recently has there been significant effort placed in understanding cardiovascular disease in women. The access to preventive services such as screening for hypertension and diabetes is not universal in Los Angeles and that may translate to unnecessary disease progression and late diagnosis of significant but silent cardiovascular disease in women. This is particularly true for women with physical disabilities. The cost of care is also an important issue and a barrier to preventive services.

Lack of access to screenings may translate to unnecessary disease progression.

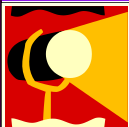
What is the most exciting area of cardiology right now?

I feel that understanding the mechanisms of cardiovascular disease leads to effective prevention and care. Important research is ongoing in the area of metabolic syndrome and its' effect on cardiovascular disease. Because it is so common in Los Angeles, the impact of effective prevention will be significant.

(Continued on p.6)

The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patient in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease.

Thomas A. Edison



Spotlight on our Community Partners Tzu Chi Medical Foundation



The Tzu Chi Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in the impoverished east coast of Taiwan. The Foundation has been contributing to **better social and community services, medical care, education and humanism** in Taiwan for nearly 40 years.

In 1989, Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation USA was established in California as a non-profit organization. Since then, 62 local offices have been established with 100,000 members in the U.S. working to make a difference in their local communities.

In addition to **charity**, the foundation dedicates itself in the fields of **medicine, education, environmental protection, international relief work** and the establishment of the world's third largest **marrow donor registry**. It also promotes **humanistic values** and **community volunteerism**.



The Tzu Chi Medical Foundation was a key volunteer organization staffing Remote Area Medical's "**Reach Across America**" event at the Inglewood Forum **August 11-18, 2009**. Tzu Chi provided **500 volunteers** in the areas of alternative medicine, dental, medical doctors, nurses and chiropractors. Tzu Chi volunteers also filled prescriptions and served vegetarian lunches. The Reach Across America Free Clinic served over **8932 patients in 8 days**.



From left: Debra Boudreaux, Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic, Kevin Sim, MD, Dongmei Wang, MD, Kenneth Lin, MD, Victor Cheng, MD and Marie Kreimann, PHN.

The **Asian Women's, "Guard Your Health" Conference** took place at the Los Angeles County Arboretum in Arcadia on **August 1, 2009**. The event was organized by the Breast Health Promotion Task Force of San Gabriel Valley with generous support from the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation. **Health education, workshops on breast cancer screening, prevention and healthy lifestyles** were provided to **over 350 women**.

Tzu Chi conducts **medical outreach** to remote areas 21 times per year, including 4 recurring locations. The program has expanded to winter **homeless shelters** and annual urban medical outreach projects. For more info go to:

<http://www.us.tzuchi.org/usa/home.nsf/home/index> ♦

*"Good actions require everyone's cooperation and willingness to undergo hardship for the sake of helping others. This is compassion."
Tzu Chi Founder Master Cheng Yen*

Happiness continued from page 2

compassionate. So happiness from the heart filled with emotions has no set end point. Research in the field continues to propose mechanisms and pathways to better

Happiness is strongly associated with compassion.

understand the nature of happiness and develop treatment modules for many chronic conditions such heart disease and depression, conditions highly prevalent in women.

Happiness and the Public's Health

Happiness in the context of the public's health is beneficial at the physiological, individual and community level for the effective functioning of a society. At the physiological level, happiness has psychosocial responses that can predict health outcomes. With increased happiness levels, positive health behaviors increase.⁸ People are more likely to engage in physical activity, wear sunscreen, and go for regular checkups. It has been shown that happiness greatly decreases cortisol levels. Limited cortisol exposure is associated with reduced risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.⁸

Happiness has psychosocial responses that can predict health outcomes

Happiness is associated with reduced risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease⁸.

At the individual level, happy people generally have more friends, are more likely to be leaders, are sociable, have a high level of self esteem, attract more happy people, generally live longer and possess the happiness traits: love, zest, gratitude and curiosity all of which result in increased life satisfaction. Increased life satisfaction leads to happier people.

At the community level, social strengths (love, zest and social support) together with increased curiosity, creativity, social tolerance and democratization increase life satisfaction which in turn promotes happiness. Societies with increased life satisfaction are happier, healthier and live longer. ♦

For more information on the new field of Positive Psychology, please visit the Claremont College conference on Positive Psychology website at: <http://www.cqu.edu/pages/5808.asp>

References

1. David Leonhardt. *He's happier, she's less so*. New York Times. September 26, 2007.
2. National Wellness Institute. 2009. Available at: <http://www.nationalwellness.org>
3. Dr. Dan Siegel. *The Mindful Brain and attainment in the cultivation of well-being*. New York; 2007
4. Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener. *Happiness: unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).
5. Gregory Berns. *The Science of finding true fulfillment*. Henry Holt & Company, Incorporated; 2005
6. Davidson, R. J., & Lutz, A. 2008. *Buddha's brain: Neuroplasticity and meditation*. IEEE Signal Processing Magazine, 25(1), 171-174.
7. Ryff, C. D., Love, G. D., Urry, H. L., Muller, D., Rosenkranz, M. A., Friedman, E. M., Davidson, R. J., & Singer, B. (2006) *Psychological well-being and ill-being: Do they have distinct or mirrored biological correlates?* Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 75, 85-95.
8. Ekman, P Davidson, R. J., Ricard, M., & Wallace, B. A. 2005. *Buddhist and psychological perspectives on emotions and well-being*. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14, 59-63.

"You must BE the change you want to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi

Interview with a Cardiologist *continued*

What do you consider your most valuable contribution to cardiology thus far?

Early in my career, I wrote a paper on exercise testing in heart failure. This data is still quoted in heart failure prognosis literature. More recently, the work on cardiovascular risk factors in women with spinal cord injury has contributed to our understanding of metabolic abnormalities associated with lack of mobility in women. This work constitutes the baseline for the next step which will include finding appropriate and effective intervention.

What research or advocacy projects are you working on now?

We are in the process of searching for funds to design and conduct a cost-effective intervention to prevent atherosclerosis in women with various disabilities. We at Rancho are going to have a series of brainstorming sessions to form an effective advocacy panel to deal with issues facing women with disabilities. We are grateful for the Office of Women's Health for the ongoing support and encouragement we have received.

What new developments in the treatment of spinal cord injury and heart disease do you anticipate in the near future?

We are looking forward to the exciting possibility of using stem cells to reverse paralysis. It will take some time for the clinical trials of stem cell therapy to develop so meanwhile we will continue to research for the best therapies and preventive measures in women with disabilities. ♦

Now Available!

The Elder Women's Initiative Report

The Women's Foundation of California is committed to building a movement led by diverse elder women and their allies to create a California where we can all age with dignity, well-being and economic security. **Agenda for Action: Building a Movement for Elder Women's Advocacy** presents the findings from the Elder Women's Initiative research and Speak-Outs organized through the combined efforts of The Women's Foundation of California, The California Endowment, UCSF Institute for Health & Aging, and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development.

For a copy of the report,, please visit our website – [preventionmatters.org](http://www.womensfoundca.org/site/c.aqKGLROAIrH/b.4339529/k.6D7A/ElderWomens_Initiative.htm) - or The Women's Foundation website: http://www.womensfoundca.org/site/c.aqKGLROAIrH/b.4339529/k.6D7A/ElderWomens_Initiative.htm

OWH at Recent Community Events



**Esther McDowell with
Assembly Speaker Karen Bass
Annual Community
Coalition Gala**



**Magic Johnson with
Gladys Edwards
Magic@50
Community Health Expo**



**Congresswoman Judy Chu
with Veera Dang
Asian Women's Health
Conference**



**City Councilman Bernard Parks
with Dr. Rita Singhal, Dr. Susan
Nyanzi, & Esther McDowell
Black Women for Wellness
Conference**

Update: Women's Health Policy Summit Implementation

Building Multi-Cultural Women's Health: Setting an Agenda for Los Angeles

The May 2007 Women's Health Policy Summit convened by the Office of Women's Health (OWH) and collaborating organizations brought together over 400 women's health leaders who developed policy recommendations to eliminate health disparities and improve the health of women in Los Angeles County. The OWH, together with our internal and external partners, began the implementation phase of the 48 recommendations in the Fall of 2007. Funding was received from Kaiser Permanente for a Summit Implementation Coordinator, Susan Berke Fogel, JD, who, with key OWH staff, provides leadership to the committee work.

Implementation of the Summit Recommendations is achieved through several vehicles of collaboration: The Summit Leadership Task Force (composed of over 50 community-based advocates, researchers, medical professionals, and representatives of key departments of the Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health and Health Services); Summit Working Groups; and collaborations with community-based organizations and key stakeholders.

2008-2009 activities included:

- Formal research and interviews with over 30 experts and collaboratives to identify priority issues, resources and materials.
- A Funder's Forum to increase funders awareness of the key women's health issues in Los Angeles County.
- Education and Training Committee/Cultural Competency—held LA County Cultural Competency Convening of key experts to discuss priority issues and ways to reduce health disparities.
- Women's Health Data Committee—*Women's Health Trends in Los Angeles County 1997-2007* report released and distributed; Finalized 2nd edition of Women's Health Indicators report, to be released early 2010.
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity—Lesbian Health committee convened and working with the City of West Hollywood to establish priorities. CDC-approved Lesbian Health provider trainings on cultural competency held with over 100 attendees.
- Violence and Health—Active on the planning committees for a Human Trafficking Briefing for Women's Health Experts and the Media, and the 2nd *Ending Violence Against Women* summit.
- Disability and Access—Developed initial survey of California OB/GYNs regarding the sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities, to be distributed in 2010.
- Reproductive Health and the Environment—Planning committee of public health, academic, research, public policy, advocacy and women's health experts planning leaders conference on Reproductive Health and the Environment in January 2010.
- DPH/DHS Working Group on Reproductive Health—Ongoing collaboration that is committed to improving, streamlining, and integrating Reproductive Health in both the Departments of Public Health and Health Services.
- Healthy Lifestyles and Chronic Disease Prevention—Latina Community Dialogue on Heart Health and Nutrition held; Active on the planning committee for Public Health's Physical Activity Summit in early 2010.
- Healthy Aging and the Social Determinants of Health—OWH is working in several capacities to study the issues (local and state) and determine what aspect of healthy aging OWH should focus on for 2010.

If you are interested in participating in any of these workgroups, please contact the OWH.

~ OWH Staff ~

Ellen Eidem, MS
Director

Rita Singhal, MD, MPH
Medical Director

Jessica St. John
Sr. Staff Analyst
Special Projects Manager

Esther Arias McDowell
Outreach & Education
Manager

Susan Nyanzi, DrPH, CHES
Research Analyst III

Susana Sevilla, MPA
Program Manager

Elizabeth Stillwell, RN
Staff Nurse

Gladys Edwards
Secretary

Rickey Payne
Data Processing

Hotline Operators

Denise Pacheco, Supervisor

Eun Hi An

Lydia Arizmendi

Veera Dang

Aylin Keshishian

Monica Macias

Elaine Yep

Carmen Maria Zapata

2009 Interns/Volunteers

Kristen Caldwell
Elizabeth Gildemontes, MSW

Armineh Kashishian

Bo Kim

Lindsey Kirkpatrick

Amy Lau

Frances Orozco

Vena Sobhawongse

Melissa Yu

~ OWH in Action ~

Some of our 2009 activities

ABC-TV7 Collaboration

For the past 3 years, the OWH has worked in collaboration with ABC7 and other partners on **ABC's of Women's Health: Prevention Matters!** campaign.

Each year, we have developed a booklet in English and Spanish guiding women through each decade of life with healthy lifestyle steps and prevention tips to help them be their best.

The booklets are available for your clients by contacting the OWH.

Increasing Latino Voices in Cancer Research

November 14

The OWH served on the planning committee for this conference highlighting the importance of research and data to meet the needs of the 13.2 million Latinos in California.

Hosted by the Center of Community Alliance for Research and Education (CCARE) at the City of Hope.

Removing the Barriers

Providing Culturally Competent Care to Women who Partner with Women
October 15 and 16

The OWH, in collaboration with the Mautner Project, provided trainings on lesbian health care, funded by the Mautner Project and Aetna and hosted by Planned Parenthood LA and Public Health's STD program.

See the OWH website for a copy of the Mautner Project's report
LGBTQ Tobacco Use Research
2009 Anti-Smoking Campaign Messaging
www.preventionmatters.org

Latina Community Dialogue

at St. Odelia Elementary School
June 20

The OWH presented a community dialogue in English and Spanish to promote heart health education and encourage low-income Latinas to make healthy lifestyle changes and become health advocates for themselves and their families.

Funding was provided by a Heart Truth grant from HHS Region IX.

Channel 22 Collaboration

Summer 2009

The Office of Women's Health worked with Spanish language television station **KWHY-22** to produce 5 weekly segments on women's health.

Cervical Cancer Awareness aired June 18, followed by segments on Breast Health Awareness, Ovarian Cancer, Depression and Stroke.

The Women's Health Hotline was open late each evening to answer calls and make referrals.

Women In Pain Conference

Gender Matters:

Building Bridges to Optimum Health
September 18

The OWH served on the planning committee for this event hosted by **For Grace and Healthy African American Families**.

According to the National Institutes of Health, **women experience more pain than men** and are more prone to pain disorders such as fibromyalgia, pelvic pain and rheumatoid arthritis.

But because of **cultural, economic and political barriers**, women are less likely to receive treatment.

Ending Violence Against Women Summit

Making it Happen in Los Angeles

October 6

A knowledge-building event for those accountable for services and the safety of affected women and those who can drive change.

Convened by Project Five-0 Los Angeles, a partnership of Soroptimist International of LA, Business & Professional Women International, & the American Assoc. of University Women.