

Chicago, Illinois

On April 10, 2010, the collaboration of the Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment (AFIRE) and the Filipino American Community Health Initiative of Chicago (FACHIC) began the training for community health educators and outreach workers to popularize, engage and organize kababayans to promote healthy lifestyles.

Dubbed as Community HOPE (Health Outreach, Promotion, and Education), the training encourages learners to examine their lives critically and take action to change social condition. Dr. Jane Jih, FACHIC executive director and principal coordinator of the faculty, welcomed the first batch of students by challenging them to address the health disparity affecting the Filipino Americans in Chicago. "I am glad to work with AFIRE in training community health promoters."

Dr. Jih asserted. "As a physician, I am concerned about the lack of research and health outreach in the community. Based on the limited research findings, heart disease is the leading cause of death among Filipino Americans and 9% of Filipino Americans are estimated to have diabetes."

Indeed, the training aims to improve the quality of life of Filipinos by facilitating access to basic community health education and disease prevention in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner.

Health disparity

"The community needs to conduct more studies on leading causes of death among Filipinos. For example, cancer is the second leading cause of death in the community. A study of cancer registries in the United States, including Illinois, has shown that the overall death rate of cancer increased by more than 10% from 1988-1992 to 1999-2001 for Filipino Americans." Dr. Jih concluded. "CommunityHOPE is in the right direction to bring health education to lay people. An informed community can effectively address healthcare inequality by collectively gathering basic information about the community's health practices."

FACHIC has been interviewing FilAm seniors to collect health assessment data of the community. This pilot project is called the Filipino American Senior Health Assessment (FASHA) that strives to describe the presence of disease and access to health care to Filipinos and Filipino Americans in the metro Chicago area.

Learning in a fun way continues

The training is unique in using popular education as its pedagogical platform. CommunityHOPE's curriculum is designed to raise awareness of health disparities in the community. The first session provided insights on preventing diseases by just changing one's eating and thinking habits. The students expressed appreciation to the interactive and fun way of learning health issues. "I am more enthused to become a community health promoter because I can make a difference to my own health and the health of my kababayans," opined one of the students. Indeed, the training connects the students' experience to larger societal problems and it empowers the students to effect change in their own health lifestyles while understanding the root causes of disease in a wholistic way.

CommunityHOPE will run until May 22nd. "I invite FilAms interested in developing their leadership qualities, in understanding disease prevention and in becoming a healthcare educator to register for our next training session," enjoined Kristina Tendilla, AFIRE's CommunityHOPE coordinator.

To register for the next training, call Kristina at 757-416-2522 or email her at communityHOPE@fachic.org

To learn about how to participate in the Filipino American Senior Health Assessment (FASHA), please contact FACHIC at 312-962-7748 or email fasha@fachic.org

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