

## Cancer and AAPIs

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the US. In 2003, an estimated 1,334,100 people in the US are expected to be diagnosed with cancer, and 556,500 are expected to die from cancer. (American Cancer Society, 2003). One-half of new cancer cases occur in people aged 65 years and over. (US DHHS, 2000).

Between 1990 and 1996, the lung and bronchus, prostate, female breast, and colon and rectum were the most common cancer sites for all racial and ethnic populations in the US. Together, they accounted for approximately 54% of all newly diagnosed cancers. (US DHHS, 2000).

To many, cancer embodies the fear of pain, suffering, and death (Sontag, 1977). Prevention and early detection are key elements in control, but unlike other chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, cancer evokes a fear that creates barriers to the utilization of health care services. Successful cancer prevention and treatment efforts must be tailored to address the distinct health beliefs and behaviors of different cultural groups.

Although the specific causes of most cancers are not well understood, **cancer is thought to be caused by three factors: environmental exposure, viral agents, and genetic predisposition.**

Environmental factors include lifestyle behaviors such as cigarette smoking and improper diet. Smoking has been linked to cancer of the lung, mouth, bladder, and other organs. Diets high in fat and low in fiber have been linked to cancer of the colon. Excess alcohol intake has been associated with cancer of the esophagus, tongue, and pharynx. (Metzlin, 1992).

Viral infections have been implicated in a growing number of cancers. The human papillomavirus is thought to play a causal role in the development of cancer of the cervix. Those who carry the hepatitis B virus have a greatly increased risk of liver cancer. *Helicobacter pylori* has been shown to be related to stomach cancer, and the Epstein-Barr virus is related to cancer of the nasopharynx. (Nomura et al., 1991).

The third cause, genetic predisposition, appears to account for only 2% of the cancer incidence. (Desmond, 1987).

### **Recommendation**

Help your clients modify their behavior to:

- Eliminate cigarette smoking
- Modify diet and alcohol intake
- Avoid exposure to other environmental or occupational carcinogens
- Prevent exposure to hepatitis B virus
- Undergo testing to detect early-stage cancer and maximize positive treatment outcomes
- Report symptoms of cancer for which there are no screening tests

(Jenkins and Kagawa-Singer, 1994).

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