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Published by the Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Inc. (APICHA), a non-profit organization providing comprehensive primary care to Asian and Pacific Islanders, LGBT people and people living with HIV/AIDS. Using the foundation of our holistic, culturally competent HIV Care Model, expanded the model to a patient-centered medical home managing other medical conditions affecting the populations we serve, APICHA is a unique space for marginalized and vulnerable individuals.

## APICHA Accommodates More Patients

Asians & Pacific Islanders and LGBT Receive the Support of Comprehensive Services

In just one year since the official opening of its medical home, APICHA has enrolled 400 new general primary care patients while the HIV primary care clinic has seen a 20% increase during the same period. The launch of this patient-centered medical home, with its progressively broadening range of programs and services, was fueled by the escalating needs of New York City's Asian and Pacific Islander (A&PI) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) populations. While study after study emphasizes the alarming and complex barriers preventing these disenfranchised groups from equal access to health care, APICHA has been facing this reality on their behalf daily for over two decades.

### A Haven to Come Home To

Even as it assumes more patient coverage, APICHA adheres to its dedication to HIV related services. Along with other demographic groups, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS undergoing treatment also continues to rise. In his feature story on the APICHA Medical Home launch for the Gay City News, Paul Schindler pointed out, "AIDS services groups see a strong link between discrimination and lack of social and economic support and HIV risk". That discrimination is also why HIV risk can be neglected by heterosexuals who may erroneously associate it as solely an LGBT problem, as exemplified in cases profiled below. But with APICHA's more proactive outreach programs in HIV and STD testing, disparate groups of people now realize the importance of knowing their health status.

David, originally from Shenzhen, China and now an accountant in New York, was looking forward to a bright future with his fiancée. He did not imagine that he was in any way susceptible to HIV. But when he experienced a dramatically abrupt weight loss followed by severe fever, he went into an emergency room. To his surprise, he received a positive HIV test result. Overwhelmed by all its implications, he turned to APICHA for help. With sympathetic yet thorough counseling, David gradually came to terms with his situation and was eventually able to take the consequent steps of dealing with it. His APICHA HIV specialist educated him on HIV, his prescribed medication, as well as the importance of adhering to the regimen. He then brought his fiancée into the process, admitting his

sexual history to her, and enabling them to move forward as a couple. They've since been carefully advised on how they can manage David's condition, prevent any sexually-transmitted disease and safely start a family together.

Through a scrupulously consolidated system, APICHA patients are ushered through each step of their appropriate testing, diagnosis and treatment course with genuine compassion and concern. And that's exactly what 22-year old Ayako, discovered when she arrived at APICHA with symptoms of a sexually-transmitted disease. An art student originally from Tokyo, Ayako's youth and propensity for clubbing had led her to some risky behavior and she was afraid. But she had mustered the courage to come to APICHA, having heard of the agency's sympathetic handling of cases such as hers. Her initial apprehension and discomfort with the thoroughness of the physical examination were alleviated by the sincerity of the APICHA care provider, who explained that she had a form of human papillomavirus or HPV. She was then placed under regular monitoring to ensure that the HPV would not lead to cancer.

Each patient at APICHA is managed with non-judgmental recognition of human conditions and a purely individualized approach to care. Such a delicate handling was required when 34 year-old graduate student James came into APICHA. Already burdened by stress from his graduate studies, James, who relocated here from California, was also beset by a deepening sense of low self-worth. He associated each rejection from a man he would approach for a date as an indictment of what he perceived was the loss of his youth and appeal. James would then use crystal methamphetamine as a way to feel invincible and attractive. But once the stimulant wore off, he would experience severe depression and guilt for having squandered money and time that could've been allotted to studying.

At APICHA, his medical provider expressed concern that reduced inhibition associated with the use of the drug could contribute to risky sexual behavior and suggested that James attend a group for crystal meth users. Unfortunately, James refused to admit to having a substance abuse problem and was reluctant to discuss any dangerous situation in which he was possibly placing himself.

*Continued on page 4*

## Your Support Saves Lives – Grants, Contracts and Gifts JUL 1, 2010 - MAR 30, 2011

APICHA's programs and services are made possible by the following grants, contracts and the generous contributions of fund, time and support from public service and private individuals. On behalf of the vast number of A&PI, LGBT and the people of New York City who receive the help they most desperately need, our sincere appreciation goes to the following:

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HIV Prevention, Young Men of Color who have Sex with Men

#### Health Resources and Services Administration

Outpatient Early Intervention Services (HIV)

#### New York State Department of Health, AIDS Institute

Food and Nutrition for PLWH/A  
HIV Prevention, Community of Color Initiative  
HIV Prevention, Peer Initiative  
HHS LGBT Initiative  
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#### New York State Department of Health, COBRA Case Management

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## HEALTH: Leading the Way to Effective Hepatitis B Treatment Solutions

APICHA has adopted a progressive method in its ongoing efforts to combat Hepatitis B infections. Rather than a more costly and less effective suppressive option, APICHA Chief Medical Officer Dr. Robert Murayama has been taking a more aggressive treatment approach with an eye towards curing the infection in certain groups of patients. Whenever appropriate, he's placing patients on interferon, the same injection medication used to treat Hepatitis C.

APICHA is one of very few independent medical facilities that are on par with larger state-of-the-art hospital-based facilities which

### APICHA Presents Testimony on Hepatitis Before The New York City Council

The New York City Council's Committee on Health recently held a hearing on "HIV/AIDS-Hepatitis Co-Infection – Education, Prevention and Treatment" where APICHA Project Manager Joey Akima spoke on behalf of Dr. Murayama and the entire agency. During his testimony before chair Maria Del Carmen Arroyo and the ten-member committee, Mr. Akima said, "We started using interferon ourselves because we had experience (with) the medication, dealing with side effects and prescribing growth factors when necessary to stimulate the production of red and white blood cells. Our protocol has proven to be on target." After providing the committee with a statistical overview of APICHA patients, Mr. Akima explained that left undetected and unmanaged, the Hepatitis virus has a long latent period when people appear asymptomatic. This, he added, can often lead to complacency that allows the virus to do further damage which may result in liver cancer or cirrhosis. Mr. Akima closed by proposing workable recommendations in dealing with HIV/AIDS-Hepatitis Co-Infection such as: Encouraging community health centers serving A&PI, LGBT and people living with HIV/AIDS to adopt a more aggressive screening protocol for Hepatitis B and C infections and integrate Hepatitis services into its primary care; expanding immunization and prevention campaign programs targeting populations at high risk for Hepatitis; and increased funding to provide further education and outreach as well as services for the uninsured.

have implemented this standard of care. At the forefront of dealing with HIV/AIDS, STDs and other medical challenges faced by its core patient demographics, APICHA is ideally positioned with highly trained medical providers and support staff already able to administer this aggressive approach as they confront Hepatitis B infections on an increasing basis.

### Cure or Suppress

As various treatment strategies continue to emerge, advances in the understanding of the differences between a curative versus a suppressive approach have become more evident. The previously preferred first line treatment was to administer an oral medication that suppresses Hepatitis B virus activity. But this approach has often resulted in the virus rebounding as well as becoming resistant to the medication.

According to Dr. Murayama, the curative approach using interferon, a naturally-occurring protein in the human body that's released when an infection occurs, is most effective in young people with abnormal liver function tests. He says, "It helps prevent the hepatitis virus from infecting new cells and boosts the immune system's ability to destroy the virus. The course of treatment is 48 weeks with predictable side effects. Select patients show a durable response rate of up to 80-90%. Though success rates still remain lower among those who are co-infected with HIV, this approach offers an overall improvement in the health status of the patients. Interferon has proven to be not only a more viable option but ultimately a more effective treatment when the goal is the cure."

He adds, "At APICHA, where we often deal with patients who may also be co-infected with HIV, we consider the entire spectrum of patient care from treatment efficacy, safety, rate of resistance to method of administration and financial burden." Under Dr. Murayama's guidance, administering the latest and most appropriate treatment methods has made APICHA among the most highly regarded and reliable medical facilities in its field.

### Prevention is Still the Best Choice

For the majority of those infected with chronic Hepatitis B, symptoms are rarely apparent until the disease may have already caused cirrhosis or cancer of the liver. The mortality rates due to liver-related diseases are 25% among

those infected unless treated early. As with most medical concerns, getting tested early is key. If already infected, healthy lifestyle choices - including avoiding alcohol and smoking and using protection during sex - help prevent transmission of the virus to others and curtail the spread of the Hepatitis infection. If a person is uninfected, a 3-dose vaccination series against Hepatitis B ensures against acquiring the virus. Prevention through immunization against Hepatitis B is the best choice. APICHA screens for Hepatitis A, B and C, provides free vaccinations against Hepatitis A and B for people who are susceptible to the infection, and treats chronic Hepatitis B and C. ■

### Asian Pacific Islander Americans Are at Highest Risk

Hepatitis B remains among the most significant health concerns for America's Asian and Pacific Islander population. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2010 that of 1.25 million Americans nationwide identified as Hepatitis B carriers, up to 50% were of Asian and Pacific Islander descent. In New York City alone, screenings show that up to 15% of Asian Americans have chronic Hepatitis B.

Studies suggest a number of contributing factors including the virus' endemic pervasiveness in Asia (along with Sub Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe) and its vertical transmission from a native Asian mother to her child. In the United States, transmission routes - including exposure to contaminated hypodermic needles, blood and body fluids exchanged through unprotected sex - are mitigated by the more insidious problems of lack of awareness and information and the cultural stigma that inhibit a majority of Asian and Pacific Islanders from receiving testing and proper medical management. Among patients who have diagnosed chronic Hepatitis B, the likelihood of eventually developing complications including liver cancer is ten times higher in Asian Americans, the highest rate among any group of Americans. Studies further reflect that nearly 10% of those who have been shown to be HIV positive are also co-infected with Hepatitis B.

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## APICHA Accommodates More Patients

*Continued from page 1*

Several times, he cancelled at the last minute the appointments for meth addiction treatment. Eventually, he returned to APICHA one day, admitting with anguish to his medical provider that one of his dates had stolen his laptop, which contained much of the research materials he had labored for so long to gather. At present, though he still refuses any referral to meth addiction treatment, James is making progress through continued mental health counseling at APICHA.

## Mental Health in the Pursuit of Overall Well Being

Counseling has always been an important part of helping patients deal with HIV testing whether it results in a negative or positive outcome. To achieve better health outcomes, developing an ongoing dialogue with patients regarding their treatment options is crucial. But continued advances in all areas of medical practice also undeniably indicate that addressing a patient's overall well-being invariably contributes to the success of treatment regimens. Mental as well as emotional states, from predispositions to addiction, chemical imbalance, deep seated traumas and many others are also intricately associated with certain afflictions. To alleviate these ancillary causes, arrive at a complete diagnosis and provide the most appropriate treatment, APICHA has integrated mental health services into primary care.

Among the many recipients of this important mental health program is Mylan, a 37 year-old woman formerly from Myanmar who came to APICHA seeking help for a persistent lack of sleep aggravated by a growing inability to get out of bed in the mornings. As the eldest, she had always looked after everyone else in her family and had therefore felt obligated to immigrate to the United States in order to help provide for them after they had suffered from financial setbacks. Regrettably the limits of her resources did not allow for her siblings to attend college and this weighed heavily on Mylan. Her APICHA mental health provider pointed out to her that these signs of depression were compromising her health. Through a series of regular short-term psychotherapy sessions at APICHA, she has since learned to relinquish some of the guilt she had been harboring and move on with her life with a more positive outlook.

Another mental health issue was identified in 39-year old Taiwanese native Ken, who was diagnosed with bipolar illness, a condition held in check as long as he followed his medication regimen. But when an inconsistent work schedule as restaurant manager forced him to skip his medication,

his behavior became increasingly erratic, from cavalierly treating his restaurant patrons to free drinks and running up extravagant credit card bills purchasing electronics to calling up friends in the middle of the night. Once Ken was able to get to APICHA, his mental health provider was able to admit him to a hospital where they adjusted his medication to compensate for his chemical imbalance.

Using a standardized questionnaire that screens for mental health problems, patients who are determined to have mental health needs are assessed by a clinical Psychologist or licensed Clinical Social Worker who can provide onsite short-term therapy. Aside from several available A&PI language-specific support groups, those who may require more intensive psychotherapy, psychiatric or substance abuse treatments are placed with partner agencies that provide suitable treatment including the Asian Mental Health Program at Hamilton-Madison House and the Lucy A. Wick Clinic Post-Graduate Center for Mental Health. Ongoing evaluations are conducted during all appointments for patients with substance abuse problems and when necessary patients may be referred to either partner Greenwich House or Hamilton-Madison House.

## Additional Health Support

A registered dietician with certification as a diabetes educator is available to oversee all diabetic and HIV patients for nutritional assessments to further support their treatment and healing with nutrition and proper diet. Low income HIV-infected patients may also access APICHA's Food and Nutrition Program, which is supported by the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute. Proper consideration is given to the patient's culture and preferred cuisine. Supplemental nutrition seminars are held quarterly while those displaying elevated cholesterol or high blood pressure may access individual nutritional counseling.

For instance, when Kwai Lin, a 56 year-old immigrant from the Fujian province in China, came to APICHA, she had been experiencing alternating episodes of pain and numbness in her feet. A seamstress for a garment factory in Chinatown, she was not earning enough to afford insurance and did not know where to turn until she learned of APICHA from her co-workers. Here she was met by a care provider who not only spoke her native Fujianese but was able to make her feel comfortable enough to ally her worries. Although not conventionally within the high-risk category, she was, like everyone admitted for primary care, offered an HIV screening taken with a finger stick test. She was cleared from HIV but was diagnosed with diabetes, high cholesterol, and spinal stenosis,

*Continued on page 8*

## Neighbor Taking Care of Neighbor

Historically encumbered by poverty and disenfranchised residents, the adjoining neighborhoods of Chinatown, the Bowery and the rest of Lower Manhattan endure with a little help from the active involvement of organizations like APICHA and concerned individuals like Dr. Lisa Eng.

## A Refuge for Outsiders

Dr. Eng was already practicing here, from a fairly modest clinic four stories above a frenetic block of fish and meat markets, when APICHA moved into the landmark building at the corner of Broadway and Walker in 2007. The supervisory officers of APICHA were introduced to Dr. Eng by mutual friend Judge Doris Ling-Cohan, an eminent local leader who now sits in the New York State Supreme Court. APICHA requested the introduction to foster synergistic opportunities with established community proponents.

It was a meeting of similar goals, recalls Dr. Eng who founded the New Life Ob/Gyn Group in 1995 and shares with APICHA a similarly distinguished reputation for community advocacy and medical outreach to Asian and Pacific Islander people. A proud immigrant whose grandfather started working in Chinatown in the 1930s; Dr. Eng is especially sympathetic to the plight of other immigrants who constitute the majority of her patients. It is frequently brought to her attention that she could have very easily worked elsewhere and by implication benefitted from a more financially rewarding practice. But she is a passionate supporter of accessible health care for everyone and like APICHA is adamant to practice where she is needed the most.

New York City neighborhoods are remarkably protean – from its parameters and the value of its real estate to the very composition of its inhabitants. But the consistency of the grumblings of how different the city is from what it used to be only confirms the accuracy of the adage “the more things change, the more they stay the same”. Throughout the tumultuous transformations of the Lower East Side, much of these stretches of narrow corridors and tenement buildings have persisted as a vibrant gateway to immigrants who often feel they have to resort to self-segregation for survival. In the 1800s those teeming masses huddled here in consecutive waves of Italian, Jewish, Irish and German people who have all

undergone their turns as the target of popular derision. Even gay people have always had a foothold here with gay and lesbian bars seamlessly assimilated into the area's working class configuration since before the turn of the century. By the 1850s, Chinese immigrants had already begun settling into boarding houses on lower Mott Street where they were able to rent not apartments but bunks sleeping up to fifteen people to a room. What was once the notorious Five Points area may have been co-opted by the city government and converted into Foley Square but the remaining cluster of densely-populated neighborhoods from the

*The mere presence of APICHA*

*and clinics such as Dr. Eng's*

*presents Asians and Pacific*

*Islanders with a safe haven to*

*turn to with their health care.*

Bowery and Little Italy to Chinatown has always been home to marginalized populations.

## Location, Location, Location

Current US Census data shows that there are approximately 85,000-150,000 people who live in Chinatown. Majority are said to be Asian descent, foreign-born and by far constituting the largest concentration of Chinese people in the Western Hemisphere. About 31% of them, according to The Asian American Federation, subsist below the poverty line compared with 21% percent of those who live in other parts of the city. In a 2004 report, The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene cites unhealthy living conditions and the inability to properly access medical care as some of the reasons why disparities in income levels directly impact health. More economic problems arose during the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy when security measures called for

cordoning off large sections of the area.

And this is precisely why APICHA first moved its operations to Chinatown in 2001. As much as there was a need for bigger capacity space for its growing programs, there was an equal necessity to be situated where its patients could easily reach APICHA. Not surprisingly, other reasons such as limited English proficiency, the largely self-sustaining manner with which most Asian cultures operate and a deeply ingrained reluctance to acknowledge certain aspects of sexuality and disease prevent many Asian and Pacific Islander people from seeking help from mainstream medical facilities. The mere presence of APICHA and clinics such as Dr. Eng's presents them with a safe haven to turn to with their health care. This factored into APICHA's determination in securing a commensurate facility still within Chinatown when it was forced to vacate its former space under pressure from luxury developments edging around SoHo.

In some ways, Chinatown's demographics are slowly changing, allowing a mingling of more racial groups into its environs. But everything that it stands for as a destination for immigrants and people on the fringe of society holds intact. Dr. Eng says it even extends beyond the sense of physical proximity. “Aside from the people who live in the immediate vicinity, I have patients who come here from all over the country,” she reveals. “They take the bus, drive and somehow make their way here all the way from as far away as Louisiana, Florida or Maine. One cannot emphasize enough how important it is just to be here in Chinatown where they feel welcome and understood, where clinics like ours and organizations like APICHA can provide the care they need.”

Dr. Eng is elated to have APICHA in the neighborhood. Serving in other capacities such as president of the Association of Chinese American Physicians, Dr. Eng understands full well the value of APICHA here. Her interaction and support of APICHA have been directed at involving it in various community-based medical issues. “APICHA's concerns and objectives are analogous to my own - bringing a superior standard of care to people who may otherwise have nowhere else to turn,” she says. “As long as there are people in need, APICHA and I will remain as a sanctuary for them.” ■



APICHA Board members and honorees gathered for the APICHA 21st anniversary gala (From LEFT): Board Member Lourdes Follins; honoree B.D. Wong, famed star of film, television and stage; honoree Grace Lyu Volckhausen, president of Tiger Baron Foundation; Board Member Rev. Charles McCarron; honoree Jorge Ortoll, executive director of Ma-Yi Theatre; WPIX-TV reporter and gala master of ceremony, Arthur Ch'ien; Board Treasurer Sherida David; Board Member Simona Kwon; Board Nomination Committee chair, Mars Custodio, M.D.; Development Committee Chair of the Board Yoshiyuki John Oshima; APICHA co-founder & former Board Member, Suki Ports; Board Member Eliza Ng, M.D.; Chief Executive Officer Therese R. Rodriguez; Board Member Alex Chan, Esq.; Board Chair John Chin; and Paul Huang, president of C.J. Huang Foundation.

## “A Thousand and One Champions” Benefit Gala Commemorates the Past, Celebrates the Present and Focuses on the Future

The city’s most prominent business community leaders, policy makers, medical practitioners, local celebrities and a multitude of other valued supporters gathered at the Grand Hyatt Hotel last Fall to join APICHA for its annual Benefit Gala “A Thousand and One Champions”. Celebrating 21 years of service to the Asian & Pacific Islander and LGBT communities, the event also marked a significant juncture for the organization in its development as a medical home and its bid to be designated as a federally qualified health center (FQHC).

### Champions One and All

A highlight of the evening was the tribute to four honorees representing APICHA’s countless patrons –the Honorable Richard Gottfried of the New York State Assembly; Grace Lyu Volckhausen, president of the Tiger Baron Foundation; multi-award winning actor BD Wong; and Jorge Ortoll, executive director of the Ma-Yi Theater Company. They were cited not only for their years of significant individual support to APICHA’s far reaching goals but also for their overall impact in the larger scope of social justice. Hon. Gottfried has actively fought for important legislation in health care

for women, uninsured people and those living with HIV/AIDS. Ms. Volckhausen, who serves on the NYC Commission on Human Rights, was among the pioneers in the fight against HIV and has been instrumental in guiding APICHA’s continuing growth. Mr. Wong has been a very visible and vocal advocate for the community in many capacities. And Mr. Ortoll has been responsible for creating vital community projects while reflecting important cultural issues through the theater.

During his acceptance speech, Mr. Ortoll remarked on how he had woken up that morning to an otherwise ordinary day. The exceptions were recalling he was being recognized by his peers and how the previous night he had been riveted to his television watching the historic rescue of the Chilean miners following ten weeks of being entombed in an underground chamber. “This,” he said, “is what APICHA does – they rescue people, one by one, pulling them out of the darkness.” He expounded on the importance of APICHA and the gratification of having partnered with the agency on many projects through the years via his Ma-Yi Theater Company. “This honor,” he said, “stands as a testament of the importance of

Asian Americans in this country what we can all achieve together as a community and as a reminder of what we have yet to accomplish.”

Mr. Wong, on the other hand, opened with a joke: “I’m not a doctor, but I play one on TV”. Perhaps most popularly known for his role as a forensic psychiatrist on NBC’s Law & Order SVU, he drew parallels between his life as an actor and the tumultuous changes APICHA has undergone in serving the A&PI and LGBT populations. Ultimately, he observed, APICHA proves that responsibility for one another goes beyond mere kinship and affects the lives of everyone.

### A Call for Unity to Face Challenges

Amidst the festivities, equal considerations were given to recent achievements as well as the very future of APICHA itself. In her closing speech, APICHA chief executive officer Therese R. Rodriguez addressed the challenges ahead – not the least of which are declining public funding and the uphill climb toward official designation as a FQHC. “APICHA is an asset, not a threat to existing FQHCs,” she declared. “We need the support of FQHCs in our ser-

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The APICHA 21st anniversary gala plaques, created by noted glass artists and former APICHA Board Chair Kevin Huang, was individually inscribed with the names of the four honorees and featured APICHA’s flowering plant motif and logo against an elegant Asian design.

(From LEFT) - APICHA Board Chair John J. Chin and CEO Therese R. Rodriguez awards Jorge Ortoll, Executive Director of Ma-Yi Theatre, his plaque of honor from APICHA; and Dr. Bill Cook, who introduced Mr. Ortoll.



The Hon. Deborah Glick of the New York State Assembly for District 66, lauds APICHA for its singular focus in advocating HIV and sexual health-related services for Asian and Pacific Islanders and other communities of color.

Grace Lyu Volckhausen, president of Tiger Baron Foundation, receives her plaque from APICHA Board chair, John J. Chin.



The Hon. Grace Meng of the New York State Assembly for District 22, praised the community-based HIV and primary care services of APICHA.

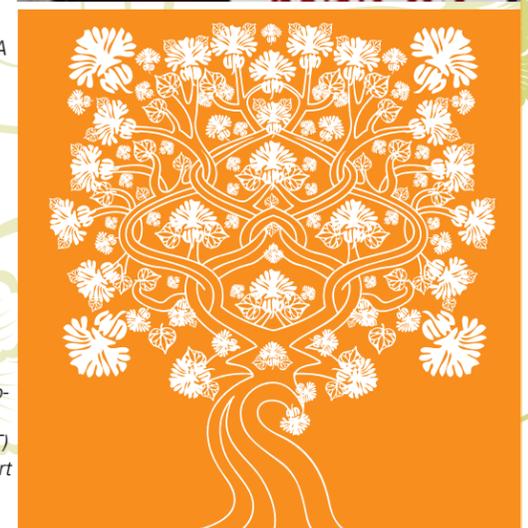
Philippine Consul General Cecille Rebong (LEFT) shows her support for APICHA here with CEO Therese R. Rodriguez and APICHA donor Cora Custodio.



Noted Filipino guitarist Michael Dadap, artistic director of the Children’s Orchestra Society (CENTER) and Yeou-Cheng Ma, violinist and executive director of the Children’s Orchestra Society (LEFT), are welcomed to the gala by Robert Murayama, M.D., APICHA chief medical officer (RIGHT).



*This is what APICHA does  
– they rescue people one by one –  
pulling them out of the darkness*



## A Thousand and One Champions

*Continued from page 6*

vice area. It is good for the business of serving our community." She points to divergent core patients from existing FQHCs as well as the need for more health care providers in light of the recent closures of New York City hospitals. According to Ms. Rodriguez, "As much as 79% right in our immediate neighborhood are medically unserved. Over 9,000 low income people have not yet been reached by existing FQHCs. Consider how a new FQHC can contribute to achieving positive health outcomes sooner rather than later. We must ensure that those 9,000 individuals get care. Not later. Now."

She said, "APICHA has the singular distinction of taking on a difficult issue. We know that even the most hard-to-reach people are reachable, because we have. We have proven that with culturally competent providers, people remain in care. Confronting stigma and discrimination head-on, we have and do bring positive health outcomes. It is just. And it is measurable. People living with HIV/AIDS are aging, living longer and afflicted with diseases that must be treated with their status in mind. The epidemic is raging in the communities of color. Asian and Pacific Islanders have the highest rate of new HIV infection among men who have sex with men. Until there is a cure,



Actor B.D. Wong (CENTER), most widely known for his role on NBC's *Law & Order*, is flanked (from LEFT) by Board chair John J. Chin, Chief Executive Officer Therese R. Rodriguez, APICHA's Chief Medical Officer Robert Murayama, M.D., and TV news anchor Arthur Ch'ien.

it is imperative that HIV/AIDS care is integrated into the health care system. Our medical home model with Asian and Pacific Islander, HIV and LGBT health at its core has contributed to healthier outcomes. Bridging disparities in our communities warrants collaboration and partnerships among existing and new FQHCs and other community organizations. Collaborations benefit the community."

She concluded by emphasizing the determination that has helped APICHA endure and succeed despite and because of its unique set

of circumstances – to steadfastly forge ahead and blaze its own trail so that Asian and Pacific Islanders, LGBTs and other marginalized, underserved populations in the city of New York are not left out. She said, "It is my hope that as we all wrestle with the impact of the new law, our leaders recognize the special role that HIV/AIDS primary care providers can play in the transformation of the health care system, that they see the merits of having more culturally competent, gay-affirming medical providers serving our community." ■

## APICHA Accommodates More Patients

*Continued from page 4*

which caused pressure on her spinal nerves. A thorough familiarity with regional customs in Asia enabled the APICHA care provider to conclude that her diet was exacerbating her condition and referred her to the nutritionist. Kwai Lin was advised on how she could resort to healthier foods such as brown instead of white rice and using less cooking oil and still enjoy the culinary choices to which she was accustomed. She was also directed to take up a form of regular exercise to help control her diabetes and lower her cholesterol. Kwai Lin now walks regularly across the Brooklyn Bridge resulting in much improved blood sugar levels, a cumulative loss of fifteen pounds and a considerable easing of her initial symptoms.

## Upgrading Database for Efficient Patient Care

As the entire country moves to update medical records to bolster efficiency, part of APICHA's expansion has already included the implemen-

tation of Electronic Medical Record (EMR) via eClinicalWorks, a system that can accurately and electronically prescribe, bill and record service data while maintaining the patient's history and most current information. Patients receiving HIV primary care, STD testing and treatment, along with general primary care services under the HEAL NY Phase 6 grant provision will have their records conveniently centralized in an onsite secure server. APICHA is now among the pioneering 7% of clinics with patients from medically underserved communities to have adopted EMR as a step forward in the ongoing national health care reform.

## Towards a Transgender Program

APICHA's strategic planning needs assessment shows that the Transgender population is among the most underserved in New York City. Currently, transgender patients at APICHA receive care through various programs under the coverage of LGBT, HIV Primary Care, Women and Youth, general Primary Care and Project

Connect, which provides mentoring and skills workshops in improving basic health and wellness for Asian and Pacific Islanders and LGBT youth and adults. But first-hand involvement with Transgender patients also discloses the need for a multi-faceted understanding of their specific care requirements.

A recent patient was Bibi, a 25 year-old male-to-female transgendered person from a proud, traditional Vietnamese family. Growing up in her homeland, Bibi was forced to endure harassment at a private school for boys and her family's constant attempts at having her undergo medical examinations to correct her natural tendencies. Her move to New York was a means of escape but she was unable to fully leave behind years of negative perception. APICHA became an important solace to her peace of mind where her medical and mental health providers were able to concertedly assist her in embarking on hormone treatments and supporting her own identity.

Conversely, another APICHA patient began

*Continued on page 12*



Members of the Filipino-American community are strong supporters of APICHA (From LEFT): actor Ching Valdez-Aran, APICHA Community & Media Relations Manager Aleli Alvarez, Cora Custodio, Angela Timtiman, Ave Pimo, and Elsa Tabije.

## Fighting For You – APICHA Intensifies Public Policy Advocacy

### Meeting Legislators In Albany

The sharp downturn in the economy that began two years ago has inevitably caused serious setbacks that continue to reverberate today. As individuals lost jobs, those who were already unable to afford health insurance were placed in even more precarious circumstances. On both local and federal levels, private and public funding for health programs and coverage have been dramatically reduced. In order to compensate APICHA has begun to proactively campaign for public policy that advocates for the continued funding of the health safety net for Asian and Pacific Islanders, LGBT, and other vulnerable communities of color affected by HIV/AIDS/STDs or deprived of medical coverage due to unemployment and other family crises.

APICHA CEO Therese R. Rodriguez and Director of Development, Gertrudes Pajaron went to the state capitol in Albany to make a formal presentation before several different state legislators and their staff including Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, the staff of Senators Malcolm Smith, John Sampson, and Thomas Duane as well as Assembly representatives Michael DenDekker, Richard Gottfried, and Grace Meng. A focal issue was the recent cuts in the state budget of member item grants that sustain operating costs for local medical facilities. The two APICHA executives outlined the health care needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities and made a case for restoring these grants, without which the continuum of HIV/AIDS programs and services as well as primary medical care for patients who are at high risk for HIV, STD and viral hepatitis may be in jeopardy.

As a member of the New York State AIDS Advisory Council, Ms. Rodriguez also participated in the council's Legislative Education Day. Together with fellow council members and other community advocates, she met with the state's senators and assembly members, health and human services committees to seek support for prevention programs, specifically needle exchange programs and the restoration of legislative member items and the funding for the AIDS Institute of the New York State Department of Health.

Ms. Pajaron, on the other hand, also joined fellow HIV/AIDS providers funded under AIDS Institutes' Community Development Initiative (CDI) to advocate for the restoration of the language in the state budget's Aid to Localities initiative that exempts CDIs, Multi-Service Organizations (MSA), and Community Services Providers (CSP) from competitive bidding. The exemption would enable community-based and faith-based organizations to continue their HIV education and prevention services without interruption. The combined efforts of CDI, MSAs and CSPs brought this issue to the attention of state policy makers that paved the way to successfully restoring the language.

### Modifying Prerequisites To Becoming A Federally Qualified Health Center

Under the auspices of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, APICHA CEO Therese R. Rodriguez appeared before a panel of officials of the White House Initiative on Asian and Pacific Islanders to engage the community for input and feedback on the provision of the new Affordable Care Act (ACA) other-

wise known as the healthcare reform law. For her presentation, Ms. Rodriguez enumerated several factors that prevent HIV organizations from achieving the goal of the National HIV/AIDS Initiative to integrate HIV service providers like APICHA into becoming federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). Current FQHC guidelines, for instance, presents disincentive to providers due to reimbursement rates that do not adequately compensate for services to people with HIV. Additionally, FQHCs algorithm currently pegs patient-provider ratios at 1,500, a very high ratio when compared to HIV of 150-200 patients per HIV-specialist provider. And, FQHC applicants are scored based on travel time it would take for patients to reach the clinic. Ms. Rodriguez proposed recommendations to the policy makers: 1) Converting the threshold visit payment method to the ambulatory patient groups method so that reimbursements are commensurate to the level and intensity of services being provided (HIV/AIDS patients require intensive care for their HIV in addition to other diseases associated with or exacerbated by the HIV infection such as diabetes, hypertension, renal disease, osteoporosis, cancers, cholesterol abnormalities and heart disease); 2) Reducing patient ratio standards for HIV specialists due to the severity and complexity of the illnesses being managed; 3) Achieving parity of recognition for HIV specialists; 4) Ensuring coverage for related medical conditions of HIV patients; and 5) Granting special waivers to FQHC applicants in urban centers related to travel time and location of facility. These recommendations, should they be implemented, would make designation as a FQHC a more achievable goal. ■

## Our Community

### A Tale of Three Immigrants

The Acacia Fund in collaboration with the Ma-Yi Theater Company recently staged a benefit matinee performance of "Flipzoids" at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater on Broadway to raise funds for APICHA. Gilda Sambajon, a registered nurse and former APICHA board member, founded the volunteer-run initiative Acacia Fund initially to support Filipino immigrants living with AIDS. Inspired by the dying words of a Filipino AIDS victim who asked to be buried under the shade of an Acacia, Ms. Sambajon named the initiative after the tree, which spreads its branches to provide a wide expanse of shelter. Following years of inactivity, Ms. Sambajon recommitted to APICHA in 2010 and activated the Acacia Fund again to help with the agency's medical home expansion. The performance of the "Flipzoids" revival presented a poignant opportunity to bring together old Acacia Fund supporters and new ones. Attendees agreed that Ralph B. Peña's critically-acclaimed "Flipzoids" is as relevant today as it was when the play originally opened here in 1996. Through its runs, the play has been hailed as an illuminating look at cross-cultural identity and the immigrant experience in the lives of three generations of Filipino Americans in a Southern California



Gilda Sambajon and Jorge Ortoll (above), award winning actress Ching Valdes-Aran (below), shown here at the reception following the special benefit performance of "Flipzoids".



suburb. Time Out New York's Paul Menard praised the latest performance in the way it "combines poetic metaphors with sly comedy" and "paints a triptych of ethnic assimilation" as "a communal expression of cultural alienation". Director Loy Arcenas' deftly minimalist staging along with lead actress Ching Valdes-Aran's Obie Award-winning portrayal of painful isolation exemplifies the kind of ground-breaking Asian American theater being produced by Ma-Yi under executive director Jorge Ortoll.

### MTV Spotlights APICHA Staffers

APICHA staff members reveal their personal insights and experiences to Francisco Ramirez on his video blog "Sex Educators Tell All" for



APICHA Talks HIV with MTV - Video Blogger Francisco Ramirez (5th from LEFT) is flanked by (From LEFT) MTV Vox Pop's Joseph Wirkowski, APICHA's Jackie Wu, "Sex Educators Tell All" director Mia Villanueva, Vox Pop Producer Sarah Fulton, and APICHA's Justin Hashimoto, Patricia Arvisu and Jarron Magallanes

MTV's Staying Alive Vox Pop program. Since it went live in February of this year, the video blog has been played some 735 times with over 80 logged on comments. The partnership began when MTV media and events producer Sarah Fulton approached APICHA LGBT Manager Jarron Magallanes with the aim of doing a project together. Mr. Magallanes brought the proposal before the APICHA team who all concurred that it was an exciting opportunity that could be incorporated into the agency's three-part World AIDS Day awareness campaign that also included week-long HIV testings and an outreach strategy of widespread distribution of complimentary safe sex kits around the block of Broadway, Lafayette, Canal and Walker where APICHA's facility is located. APICHA organized a two-day shoot of agency staffers and their peers in HIV

prevention to candidly share having faced their own fears and hesitations and the importance of HIV testing and taking that first empowering step toward knowing one's health status. Even though a severe thunderstorm eventually forced APICHA to withdraw its previous plans, the video was successfully shot for MTV. The positive reaction to the video short has been enthusiastic. A website member named Joey commented "I'm glad to see MTV's Staying Alive Foundation giving young adults information about why it's important to get tested and practice safe sex. MTV...enlisted the advice and the stories from real people and got real answers. Everyone is afraid of getting tested including myself...We don't need to be so scared because so many of us feel the same."

Another member named Erica posted her comment "It is so important to actually get over the fear and just get tested! The more open we are about our fears and concerns, the easier it is to deal with them because we know we are not alone." The MTV Staying Alive Foundation is a youth-based global mass media platform that fosters HIV prevention, safer lifestyle choices and fighting against discrimination and stigma that fuels the HIV epidemic. It uses its international reach through cable TV programming, concerts, documentaries, public service announcements, film competitions and a website accessible in 13 different languages to encourage and inspire the next generation into public awareness and involvement. View the video online under Blogs "Vox Pop: Sex Educators Tell All" at [www.staying-alive.org](http://www.staying-alive.org) ■

## APICHA SPECIAL EVENTS: Awareness is the Beginning of Prevention

APICHA marks National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day this month with a series of events that endeavors to bring renewed attention to the persistent spread of HIV infections and help unite New York's diverse A&PI population and their supporters into a proactive participation in the fight against it. First officially recognized by the US Department of Health and Human Services in 2005, the National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is an opportunity to engage not only the A&PI population but indeed everyone in addressing the still very relevant and significant issues of HIV/AIDS.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that approximately 56,300 Americans are newly diagnosed with HIV infection each year. The New York State AIDS Advisory Council estimates that 152,800 New Yorkers are living with HIV and 21% of them are unaware that they are infected. Per the updated 2008 CDC HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet, 1.1% of people diagnosed with HIV in the US are A&PI though it is further noted that "this may not reflect the true burden of the epidemic on this population" since "HIV testing rates are lower for Asian and Pacific Islanders as a group". This was supported by a study conducted in Seattle where 90% of the Asian and Pacific Islander respondents perceived themselves to be at risk yet only 47% underwent testing indicating a resistance among A&PI to getting tested. Moreover, the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Team found A&PI are significantly less likely to even admit to having been tested for HIV.

According to the 2009 New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene HIV/AIDS Surveillance Statistics - around 27% of A&PI (the largest percentage among all race/ethnicities) diagnosed with HIV were concurrently diagnosed with AIDS pointing to a considerable number of late stage testing. Probable contributing causes cited for this are language barriers, deep cultural stigmas, economic problems, a basic lack of knowledge regarding HIV and the inability to access the kind of health care services sensitive to their needs. Over two decades of experience has enabled APICHA to deal with precisely these situations and empower the A&PI and LGBT populations of New York with Awareness and Prevention.

### MAY 15 - STEP UP AGAINST AIDS

APICHA partners once again with the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) for this year's highly-anticipated AIDS Walk event. Diana Roygulchareon, Women and Youth Program Manager will be leading the APICHA Team, designated number 0066, with the able assistance of co-captains Monica Wat, Justin Demafeliz, Tylor Lei and Xin Huang. At a time when public awareness of HIV is diminished, AIDS Walk is one event where the HIV community and its allies can bring visibility to the issue. Having rallied together around a hundred team members, the APICHA contingent aims to inspire the next generation of warriors against AIDS and pull in about \$8,000 in donations. As a community partner APICHA will receive eighty percent of funds raised by the APICHA team, funds that help sustain its comprehensive programs and services. Each team member has undergone orientation on fundraising for AIDS Walk and a primer on HIV/AIDS and will be sporting a distinctive APICHA T shirt for the walk. Founded in 1986, AIDS Walk is easily the most celebrated march against AIDS. This annual fund raising event draws thousands of the city's A-list celebrities, important business and political personalities along with activists and civic minded participants and volunteers. Everyone gathers at New York City's Central Park for the 10k walk to generate attention, awareness and advocacy while raising much-needed funding for multiple AIDS related organizations citywide.

### MAY 19 - THE WOMEN in RED

APICHA, in conjunction with the Ma-Yi Theater Company and Orasure Technologies, presents a reading of Don Nguyen's play "Red Flamboyant", 6PM at APICHA 400 Broadway,

New York, NY 10013. The reading is part of APICHA's "Have You Done IT Lately" HIV/AIDS awareness campaign as well as Ma-Yi's LabFest Series of developing the works of Asian American playwrights into a full-fledged staging. Mr. Nguyen has attended several theater master classes and has amassed a number of well-received plays and monologues. With works produced in New York, Nebraska and Canada and the growing attention to "Red Flamboyant", Mr. Nguyen is among the city's most noteworthy emerging Asian American playwrights. Directed by Laura Savia, "Red



The Trung Sisters were ancient women warriors who inspired the play "Red Flamboyant" by Don Nguyen.

"Red Flamboyant" is based on the true story of Pham Thi Hue, an HIV-positive woman who founded Haiphong Red Flamboyant, a support group for women living with HIV/AIDS in Vietnam. Mr. Nguyen's play opens in the aftermath of a suicide attempt by one of Mrs. Hue's boarders, which triggers a series of events leading to the formation of the support group and its efforts to regain strength and dignity in dealing with HIV/AIDS. Designed as a deconstruction of the legendary Trung Sisters, who rebelled against the Chinese Han Dynasty, as well as a depiction of the ascendance of modern-day women warriors, "Red Flamboyant" is a powerful portrait of tragedy, survival and triumph. This special event will kick off with day-long HIV screenings by APICHA testing staff from 10AM to 6:30PM. The play reading will open with a reception, followed by the main event and a panel discussion with Mr. Nguyen and other distinguished guests. ■

## APICHA Accommodates More Patients

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life a female in Spain. Growing up as Manuela, he regularly faced shame, ridicule and even physical abuse from his own family as he tried to pursue his own path. After several attempts to run away, he was able to reach New York, determined to start anew as Manuel. By working with providers at APICHA, Manuel learned about the complex process of gender re-assignment from addressing the emotional aspects of the transition and the details of hormone and surgical interventions to the practicalities of changing his identity cards and other legal documents. The APICHA mental health and medical providers treated Manuel with the respect and dignity he deserved. And he has begun his transformation confident that he has professionals who continue to support him.

Over the years, APICHA has served the Transgender population in its HIV programs. But while majority of the newly-installed programs in the medical home expansion were complementary to most of their needs, it became apparent how imperative it was to address more requisite factors in their complete health care. APICHA envisions a Transgender Program that offers transgender-specific primary care including Hepatitis services (screening for Hepatitis A, B and C, vaccinations against Hepatitis A and B and treatments for Hepatitis B and C), STI screening, chronic disease management, disease prevention and the initiation and maintenance of hormone therapy. Additionally, essential mental health and social support services will be made available to them such as mental health assessment, short-term psychotherapy, substance abuse treatment and counseling and wellness-oriented workshops. Though most of these services are already available, a final phase is being sought to achieve the complete Transgender Program.

## Responding to Barriers and the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

Statistical reports from numerous private corporations, data gathering organizations and public institutions all show that LGBT, ethnic and low income individuals' access to health care is glaringly disproportionate in comparison with the rest of Americans. In findings compiled by the Kaiser Family Foundation, up to 17% of the A&PI in the United States was shown to be uninsured. Estimates by

the Center for American Progress show 5% of self-identified lesbian and gay adults and 28% of transgender people are uninsured due to one or more impeding factors. And unfortunately, declining budgets earmarked for public health often impacts these groups the most. In the decade between 1995 and 2005 six of the eight hospital closures in New York were in or adjacent to low-income neighborhoods or communities of color. Most recently in the last three years, three hospitals closed

*With APICHA's more proactive outreach programs in HIV and STD testing, disparate groups of people now realize the importance of knowing their health status.*

in Queens followed by the fourth and latest casualty in lower Manhattan - Saint Vincent's, which served the predominantly LGBT neighborhoods of the West Village and Chelsea.

It was in the course of APICHA's initial focus on HIV/AIDS that the need for primary care became clear. Founded upon a dedication to civic and social responsibility, APICHA was duty-bound to take decisive action in creating an alternative health care model better attuned than most conventional hospital facilities to the cultural, political, psychological, financial and even linguistic nuances of tending to the patient needs of these groups. Funding from the Health Care Efficiency and Affordability Law (HEAL) Phase 6 Capital Grant Program of the New York State Department of Health eventually enabled the agency to open the medical home. APICHA has installed enhanced programs to afford vitally necessary, comprehensive and continuous care consisting of Primary Care for high-risk HIV negative patients, HIV Rapid Testing, Comprehensive STD Screening and Sexual Health Services, comprehensive clinic for Hepatitis B and C screening, immunization and treatment, and Mental Health Services.

The expansion was guided by the tenet of combining firmly demonstrable evidence-based medical practice with a comprehensive continuum of health care in a welcoming environment for underserved and vulnerable people especially immigrant A&PIs and other communities of color, the LGBT community and individuals living with and affected by

HIV/AIDS. To that end, APICHA has earned Level 3 recognition as a Physician Practice Connections – Patient Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, the highest level attainable. This status affirms the agency's commitment not only to providing superior health care but a dependable medical provider-patient relationship that extends beyond episodic treatment to cover a meticulously coordinated and collective overall healing experience from APICHA's highly-trained team. Since then, APICHA has been able to open its doors to an even more diverse mix of minority groups, both racially and economically, that have extremely limited resources and fewer alternatives. From its historical expertise with predominantly A&PI, LGBT, ethnic and low-income patients, APICHA is constructing a truly distinctive and crucial health center.

For more than twenty years, APICHA has played an indispensable role in New York City's struggle with HIV/AIDS. The substantial new programs and coverage that characterize this stage in APICHA's evolution has been an exceptional addition to the city's health care component by caring for its acutely underserved populations. Today, A&PI, LGBT, other minority groups and low-income individuals are finding a welcoming environment and outstanding health care and at APICHA. ■

*ALL Patients' identifiable features have been changed to ensure confidentiality.*

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