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New alliance to promote Asian Health

By Bala Thomson 12/09/2012 13:47:00

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Residents of the Capital could consider themselves fortunate that the 'Wellington Regional Asian Health Alliance' (WRAHA), has been established to promote the wellbeing of the local Asian communities.

Dr Sandeep Reddy, who has rich experience in Asian health programmes, was the driving force behind this first and only initiative in the Wellington region. He approached me with the concept about three years ago.

I was happy to assist such a worthy cause, as I have always been concerned about the health needs of the elderly in the Indian community.

Primary areas of concern have been assessing whether elderly people are being well served, whether they know where to seek help when required and whether there is a dedicated rest home in tune with their language, food and culture.

Perception & Reality

There is a perception that when it comes to health, Asians do very well but this is not entirely correct. Statistics may show that Asians are healthier than some other sections of the population, but there are gaps in the system.

For instance, Asians generally do not take full advantage of the available screening services and hence remain vulnerable to debilitating diseases.

South Asians are at risk of developing diabetes and cardio-vascular afflictions. Early detection is vital to keep such diseases in check.

WRAHA aims to represent all Asian communities and discuss health issues in the Wellington region.

According to available estimates, this region accounts for 36,000 people of Asian origin, expected to move up to 56,000 by the end of this year.

This is the time to take notice and to educate our communities.

I have been in New Zealand for the past 43 years and have come across many elderly people leading a life of solitude, neglected by their families and communities.

I emphasised the importance of caring for such people during my discussions with Dr Reddy.

"Many of them are immigrants who have added to the diversity and richness of our region. They have provided skills in the workforce and helped boost the economy during their working years. They deserve the love, care and gratitude of their communities," I said.

Sadly, Dr Reddy left New Zealand to live and work in Darwin, Australia.

Network support

I am now the Chairperson of the group, and I am fortunate that I have been able to enlist the expertise and services of many dedicated people, who see the wisdom of our ambition and are prepared to work hard to advance this worthy cause.

I was particularly impressed with the full support received from the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Compass Primary Health Care Network.

Last year, we registered WRAHA as a charitable trust. It is now included in the 'New Zealand Diversity Action Programme' with the Human Rights Commission.

We are in the process of registering with the Charities Commission.

Our efforts have been modest but successful.

In 2010, WRAHA held an 'Indian Health and Wellbeing' event to inform the community of

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our existence, raise awareness about health issues and conduct a survey to assess the community's health needs.






Last year, we hosted a similar event for the Chinese community, with speakers from various organisations presenting information on health issues.

Last month we conducted a 'Chinese Expo' in Lower Hutt with the help of the Primary Health Care Network and the Te Awakairangi Health Network.

These activities will encourage WRAHA to repeat the programmes and involve other Asian groups in the future.

Bala Thomson is a longstanding friend, supporter and reader of Indian Newslink. She has been a programme presenter on Wellington Access Radio 783 AM since 1981. Her 'Bhakti Prabha' is broadcast on Saturdays at 7 am and her 'Indian Community Programme' on Sundays at 6 pm.

According to information available to us, she was the first woman of Indian origin to be appointed a Justice of the Peace and Marriage Celebrant in New Zealand. She is also a recipient of the Queen's Service Medal. Her article appeared in our July 15, 2011 issue.

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