



Los Altos Town Crier

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Hills resident Alles donates \$1 million to South Asian Heart Center at El Camino

El Camino Hospital announced last week that Los Altos Hills resident Malini Alles, founder of Stree: Global Investments in Women Foundation, has donated \$1 million to the South Asian Heart Center, the first organization in the world to address the high incidence of coronary artery disease among South Asians. Alles' donation is the first major gift received by the center.

The South Asian Heart Center is a pioneering wellness program that educates clients and physicians on research, tests and treatments unique to the South Asian community. The center will be located on the hospital's campus. Scheduled to be open in 2005, the center is currently seeking additional leadership gifts from the community.

The rate of coronary artery disease (CAD) among South Asians - men and women who trace their origins from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka - is four times higher than the general population, both here and in India. Half of all heart attacks among South Asians occur under the age of 50, and a quarter occur under the age of 40, often with no prior symptoms.

Traditional risk factors do not account for South Asians suffering heart attacks at a greater rate and at an earlier age: this population does not have a higher incidence of cigarette smoking, obesity, hypertension or high blood pressure, and nearly half are lifelong vegetarians who exercise regularly. Laboratory tests can detect several factors that are better predictors of CAD; unfortunately, few doctors routinely screen South Asian men and women for these factors, and even traditional screenings are seldom performed at the appropriate age for this population.

The body of knowledge on CAD among South Asians draws largely from the pioneering research of Dr. Enas Enas, director of the Coronary Artery Disease among Asian Indians (CADI) Research Foundation, and a member of the South Asian Heart Center's advisory board. According to Enas, "The South Asian Heart Center at El Camino Hospital in Silicon Valley will be the first organization in the world to address this critical problem. This center will demonstrate the importance of early screening and prevention education to avoid cardiac catastrophes, and its impact will be felt in countries around the globe."

Initially, the South Asian Heart Center will provide cardiac screenings for the identified risk factors in addition to prevention education and referrals to wellness providers. The center's education program will also inform the medical community about the need to adopt cardiac screening guidelines tailored to South Asians with the goal to have doctors prescribe, and insurers cover, routine tests of South Asian patients at a younger age for the specific predictors of heart disease among this population.

For more information about the South Asian Heart Center, contact Nivisha Mehta, interim executive director, at (408) 323-9275 or nivisha@sbcglobal.net.