
Local Vietnamese American Families Talk about Cancer Prevention

Cancer screening can change health outcomes. In Orange County, the Vietnamese American community — said to be the largest outside of Vietnam — has historically had lower rates of cancer screening than other groups and higher rates of certain cancers even relative to other Asian ethnic groups.

Suellen Hopfer, assistant professor of Health, Society & Behavior in the UCI Program in Public Health, and public health doctoral candidate Huong T. Duong thought intergenerational family communication might be a pathway to improving cancer prevention screening in the Vietnamese American community. In 2017, Hopfer was among the first investigators to receive an Anti-Cancer Challenge grant. With it, she launched a feasibility study called Let's Chat, a four-week intergenerational family group chat to increase colorectal, cervical and human papillomavirus (HPV) related cancer screenings.

"The family approach in today's digital world offers one way to stay connected and deliver meaningful and trusted messages through family and culture," says Hopfer, the study's principal investigator.

Let's Chat was designed to identify effective intergenerational messaging for online, family-focused social media platforms, with the goal of increasing cervical and colorectal screening behaviors among first-generation

Vietnamese community members and the children who emigrated with them with plans to extend to increasing screenings for breast and liver cancers.

The pilot study, which involved 10 families, showed potential for increasing participation in cancer screenings. As Hopfer and public health doctoral candidate Duong, reported in the [Feb. 13, 2021](#) issue of *Health Education & Behavior*, "Postintervention survey results revealed that 48 percent of participants received screening/vaccination; 77 percent reported intent to schedule an appointment to discuss recommended screenings." Equally important were the findings that the group chat intervention led to family members feeling more comfortable discussing cancer and cancer prevention within the family and with healthcare providers.

Hopfer has integrated these findings into her undergraduate and graduate Public Health communications courses asking students about their daily use of group chats in coordinating family activities, and whether they discuss health online within family chats. These academic research insights offer future professionals another perspective on how to enhance community and population and family health, improve health equity and achieve social change.

"We are encouraged by the results and hope to take this research further with



a randomized trial that group family chats by age and gender," says Hopfer. "We would welcome the community's help in implementing such an approach for submitting a proposal to the National Institutes of Health to do a larger scale study."

As part of the UCI Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center's commitment to the local Vietnamese American community, the Office of Community Outreach and Engagement established a dedicated telephone line to a Vietnamese-speaking nurse coordinator. She recently shared her own experience with cancer, which you can [read here](#). For her help navigating care, scheduling appointments and getting answers to general cancer services questions, please call 714-719-5612.