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Media Contact: Jordan Su
650.736.1883 (jordansu@stanford.edu)

Jade Ribbon Campaign to fight Hepatitis B and Liver Cancer in Korean and Korean American Communities

One in 12 Korean Americans and six million Koreans worldwide are affected by hepatitis B – a disease that is 50-100 times as infectious as AIDS and is entirely preventable. Hepatitis B can lead to liver cancer or cirrhosis of the liver, the leading cause of death for Korean males ages 30 to 50. Yet, few are aware these diseases can be prevented through a safe and simple vaccination against hepatitis B.

The Asian Liver Center at Stanford University is fighting to stop the spread of this deadly disease through the launch of its Jade Ribbon Campaign, an effort to spread awareness about hepatitis B and liver cancer in the Korean community.

The liver center has launched this campaign with the help of Korean actor Lee Jae Ryong, from the popular Korean television drama *Sang Do*. A public service announcement filmed in Seoul, Korea featuring Lee will air on television and radio stations throughout California. The PSA will be accompanied by the distribution of print advertisements and brochures relating to Asians and hepatitis B in hopes of alerting and informing the Korean community of the dangers of this disease. The campaign will also include events in the community, such as health fairs, hepatitis B screenings, and seminars to further educate the public. The Asian Liver Center is working with nearly 150 local and national community organizations to create a united effort of Asians and Pacific Islanders helping each other to eliminate this health disparity.

Hepatitis B is a blood-borne virus that afflicts the liver and can cause severe liver scarring (cirrhosis) and/or liver cancer. One in four chronic hepatitis B carriers will eventually die of liver cancer or liver failure. Hepatitis B and even early stages of liver cancer are largely asymptomatic. Thus the disease often passes from generation to generation unnoticed, and when symptoms do appear, often it may be too late for treatment to be effective.

“Hepatitis B is endemic in Asian countries where up to 20 percent of the population are hepatitis B carriers,” said Dr. Samuel So, director and founder of the Asian Liver Center.

The virus cannot be transmitted through casual contact, but rather through close intimate contact such as sharing toothbrushes and razor blades. While intravenous drug use and unprotected sex are risk factors for transmission, Koreans, like most Asians and Pacific Islanders (API), generally contract hepatitis B from their mothers at birth or during early childhood. Thus most API do not even know that they may be infected.

Even doctors often are not fully aware of this health disparity between API and the rest of the population. While the incidences of hepatitis B and liver cancer are high in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities (between 10-20 percent), only 0.1-0.5 percent of the general American population is infected with chronic hepatitis B, which is 20 times lower than in Koreans.

Often ignored in the United States, hepatitis B is slowly taking lives in the Korean community and API population at large. The mission of the Jade Ribbon Campaign is to increase awareness about hepatitis B and liver cancer and to urge Koreans to:

- * Get Tested for Hepatitis B. Koreans should specifically ask their doctors for the hepatitis B surface antigen (HbsAg) test.

- *Get Vaccinated against hepatitis B. Individuals who test negative for the HBsAg should get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

- *Get Screened for Liver Cancer. Those who test positive for the surface antigen should closely monitor their liver function and screen for liver cancer every 6 months after age 30.

For information about the Jade Ribbon campaign, call the campaign's hotline at (650) 72-LIVER or visit the Asian Liver Center website at <http://liver.stanford.edu>.