

Featured Nurse Leader

Mila C. Velasquez, MN, RN, CS, APRN, BC

Mila Velasquez is a notable nursing leader in the Filipino community. She recently (July 2006) stepped down after two years as president of the Philippine Nurses Association of America (PNAA) and just retired after over 25 years working in leadership positions within the Veterans Affairs Healthcare services. Mila received her undergraduate and graduate nursing degrees from the University of the Philippines and Post Master's (adult nurse practitioner) from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, MD. As a nursing leader, Mila has worked to transform her professional organizations by promoting professional excellence and unity. She has been active in multiple professional organizations for many years especially as an advocate for Filipino nurses. Currently, Mila is co-chair of the Asian Task Force of the American Heart Association, Western Region, a Board Member of the National Coalition of Minority Nurses Association, and Nurse Executive/Education Consultant, Health Care Services International, Inc., a nonprofit organization run by a professional group of nurses, whose mission is to provide free health care and education to underserved populations.. She is the recipient of multiple prestigious national awards including the 2004 Special Congressional Award for Public Service from Representative Bob Filner. Her most recent award was the Meritorious Presidential Leadership Award, from PNAA- July 2, 2006.



As an adult nurse practitioner, smoking cessation is one of her top priorities. “My awareness of the importance of tobacco control was in my early years as a nurse when I witnessed the devastating effects of tobacco use on my father” (who occasionally smoked tobacco to relax after a stressful day of work and though he quit smoking, eventually died of emphysema). Since then, Mila promised herself that she would be a strong advocate for tobacco control.

After participating as one of the 21 members of the national nursing leadership task force for tobacco control in the historic March 2004 summit, Mila, in collaboration with TFN and other nursing leaders, worked with the PNAA Executive Board to prioritize, approve and implement an action plan to advocate for nursing involvement in tobacco control. Mila, with Dr. Leda Danao, and Dr. Luz Porter, chair of the PNAA Research Committee, surveyed Filipino American nurses regarding tobacco control behaviors and attitudes (adapted from Dr Sarna's nurses and tobacco control survey). PNAA implemented the nationwide survey at four PNAA regional conferences and one national conference. The national data and results of the study were presented at the July 2005, PNAA Annual Convention and at the 5th PNAA International Nursing Conference in Honolulu, HI in January 2006.

The survey showed that of the 233 (49% response rate) Filipino American nurses (FANs) who participated in the survey, 214 (92%) had never smoked and only 2 (1%) were current smokers. Twenty per cent (n = 39) were living with a smoker and 38% (n = 71) had a household member with a tobacco-related illness. Similar to findings with other nursing sub-groups, almost all FANs believed that educating patients about the risks of smoking was very important, however only 17% (n = 35) were aware of the AHRQ clinical practice guideline for treating tobacco use and dependence. Participants (90%, n = 206) were overwhelmingly positive that nurses need to be involved in helping their patients quit. The results of this study will be used as a basis for future educational program offered to PNAA leadership and members to help PNAA members become tobacco control advocates in the community where they practice.

With Mila's outstanding leadership as their guide, the PNAA will continue to support activities and legislation related to tobacco control in collaboration with other professional organizations to promote a unified approach in fighting for this cause.

Mila would like to encourage nurses to become active volunteers in their professional and social communities and explore all opportunities to be involved and make a difference as a leader. Mila expressed that, “true leaders must not only have a vision; but most importantly, must act to live their vision, to make a difference.” Mila leaves an enduring

legacy of making a positive difference for tobacco control in the Filipino nursing community.

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