**4/8/12 VHIO Workshop Program Notes**

[**http://portal.sliderocket.com/BPIJY/VHIOsexualhealthcommunication**](http://portal.sliderocket.com/BPIJY/VHIOsexualhealthcommunication)

**WHO**: Hi everyone! In case you forgot, my name is Kathy Doan, your VHIO treasurer.

**WHAT**: Being in this organization, many of us serve or will soon serve as healthcare interpreters at clinics, screenings, outreach events, medical conferences, and so on because we care about the underserved communities around the Bay Area. We understand how it's important to be culturally aware of our patients' sexual health and/or other life experiences when we’re interpreting for them, but how many of you have actually taken the time to consider your own sexual health?

To kind of start off that thinking, I’ll be showing a video presentation I put together about the potential benefits that can arise when we find the courage and willpower inside ourselves to address any and all matters related to sexual health.

After the video, I’ll be passing out a “Do YOU” card with two different perspectives about sexual health communication, tips, and resources we can all learn about. Much of the information you’ll see is based on actual responses from female students, just like yourself that I’ve put together for you all.

Please also fill out the evaluation form you’ll be given as well. I’ll give everyone a few minutes and once you’re done, feel free to put them into the blue box at the front.

**WHY**: Now you’re probably wondering why I’m bringing up the issue of sexual health communication in the first place. Overall, Asian-Pacific Islander (API) Americans are less sexually active than White Americans, BUT both ethnic groups exhibit similar risky behaviors. According to a 2008 study conducted in UC Berkeley, Asian Americans on average were less comfortable communicating about sex, expressing their sexuality, and making empowered sexual decisions than White Americans. However, in a recently conducted survey of my own from many of your anonymous responses, 80% of API students actually feel NEUTRAL, MODERATELY COMFORTABLE, or VERY COMFORTABLE when discussing sexual health with their close friends.

On that note, if all of us, regardless of our cultural beliefs and backgrounds growing up, could have increased dialogue about sexual health or any related concerns when we’re fully comfortable and with the right, supportive group be it with friends, family, or medical professionals, perhaps this stigma or feelings of it being an “awkward” topic that should be kept under covers can be lessened. Whether or not you all, our members, will openly bring up this issue in future discussions by your own choice, I'd like to provide some food for thought on how to start thinking about communicating about one's sexual health with others and the resources we can turn to when necessary. Thank you and enjoy the video.

**Results from Conducted Surveys**

**Survey questions included**:

* World Health Organization defines sexual health as “a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality.” How important is your sexual health to you (regardless of whether or not you are sexually active)?
* How open/comfortable do you feel discussing sexual health and/or issues related to sex with your close friends?
  + Please briefly explain why you chose the answer for the question above.
* How open/comfortable do you feel discussing sexual health and/or issues related to sex with your family? Think about whether or not you would have a conversation about this topic with your mother or other female relative.
  + Please briefly provide your reasoning behind your answer for the question above.
* How knowledgeable are you about what’s important for preserving good sexual health?
* How influential are your cultural beliefs when it comes to discussing sex?
  + Please elaborate on how much/little your cultural beliefs affect your willingness when it comes to discussing sex with your family. How about with your friends?
* What are some ways you can think of that would make you feel more comfortable communicating about sexual health?

**Findings from 16 anonymous VHIO responses**:

* Over 50% responded they were knowledgeable about sexual health and the resources available, but didn’t personally use any.
* About 5 respondents highlighted the difference between American and Asian cultures, believing “Americans are more open when it comes to talking about sex.” Another participant affirmed in American culture, “health is important, communication is important, and sex is fun if you keep it safe, consensual, legal, etc.” We see a divide between how the respondents perceive Americans culture’s views toward sex and their Asian/Asian-American culture’s view.
* 14 of the 16 respondents stated they avoid discussing sexual health topics with their family, even with their mothers, because to do so could invite concern, even distrust and disapproval.
* Some common themes: an emphasis on the conversation in small groups with close peers/friends, discussing sexual health with a trained medical professional, whether to consider sexual health in holistic and scientific terms or from personal experience, the effect cultural beliefs can have, and the embarrassment/awkwardness that comes from discussing sexual health. Though it’s true one’s willingness to discuss sex depends on the situation and the people you’re with, cultural beliefs help us socially construct our preferences for how that takes place.
* 80% of the female Asian-Pacific Islander VHIO community felt NEUTRAL, MODERATELY COMFORTABLE, or VERY COMFORTABLE discussing sexual health concerns with their friends. Therefore, one’s willingness to talk about sex depends on which group one feels comfortable enough with and the misunderstanding that no one talked about sex was prevalent.