



REDUCING HEART RISKS IN THE CHICAGO-AREA SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

SOUTH ASIAN CARDIOVASCULAR CENTER

Million Hearts in Action

[Strategies for Achieving Million Hearts Goals]



The South Asian Cardiovascular Center is trying to lower the prevalence of heart disease in the South Asian community. Located in metropolitan Chicago region, home to one of the nation's largest population of South Asians, the Center is educating the community about heart disease risks by working with local restaurants, grocers and places of worship that have helped raise awareness about improving diet and lifestyle choices.

[Fast Facts]

- A 2006 study reported that migrant South Asian populations – people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka – have a 3- to 5- fold higher risk of myocardial infarction and cardiovascular death compared to other ethnic groups.¹
- A 2005 study reported that about 50 percent of cardiovascular deaths reported in India occur before age 50. About 25 percent of myocardial infarctions in India happen before age 40.²
- “Unlike other traditional risk factors, the prevalence of diabetes mellitus is uniformly higher in South Asians than in many other populations.”³



Our message is simple, we can do something about preventing heart disease and improving health through partnerships, dialogue, and awareness.”

– Dr. Shoeb Sitafalwalla on raising awareness about heart disease risk

[What We Did]

Dr. Shoeb Sitafalwalla created the South Asian Cardiovascular Center in March 2012 to help reduce heart disease risk within the community. Center staff reached out to South Asians where they live, worship and buy their food through three education initiatives:

1. They worked with a dinner-delivery service, which are commonly organized by South Asian faith-based congregations, to reduce sodium during meal preparation.
 - A Center dietician worked with cooks, providing tips like standardizing recipes or swapping ingredients with lower-sodium alternatives.
 - The Center also provided a list of simple, one-sentence facts about heart disease and tips on getting heart-healthy. A fact was included with every meal.

¹<https://stanfordhealthcare.org/stanford-health-now/2015/south-asians-heart-disease-qa.html>

²<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1993956/> under section: “premature CAD in Indians”

³<http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/113/25/e924#ref-1> page e925

2. The Center piloted a sodium-reduction program with four South Asian restaurants, each challenged to reduce their sodium content by 10 percent over a six-month period.

- A dietician worked with restaurant chefs on simple changes they could make – standardizing measurements, switching from canned to fresh produce – without altering flavors or kitchen workflow.
- An independent lab regularly analyzed the sodium content in dishes. Results were shared among restaurant owners, who vied to claim the largest percentage drop.

3. The organization partnered with the Patel Brothers, the nation’s biggest South Asian grocery store chain, to share information about heart disease and ways to lower risks.

- Grocery store aisles displayed posters featuring heart disease facts. Other signs helped consumers make heart-healthy choices about specific cooking oils, proteins and other types of food the store offered.

[What We Accomplished]

- Established relationships with trusted voices in the community, including business leaders like the owners of the Patel Brothers, which controls roughly 80 percent of the South Asian grocery market.
- The four restaurants that participated in the sodium-reduction pilot program reduced their levels by an average of 22.7 percent. Several chefs also reported applying many of the sodium-reducing tricks to dishes they made at home.
- The dinner-delivery service provided lower-sodium meals and heart-healthy facts to more than 800 people every day.

[What We Learned]

- Rely on helping hands. The South Asian Cardiovascular Center frequently relied upon the advice from a council of advisors – made up of trusted business, religious and media leaders – created to serve as a bridge to the South Asian community.
- The South Asian community is extremely diverse: Providing educational and promotional materials can be complex when more than 150 dialects are involved. Most pamphlets and literature had to be translated into the community’s top seven or eight languages.
- In addition to linguistic diversity, the Center also recognized the community’s wide diversity among religions. The most common ones observed are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Many of these and other faiths have different dietary restrictions and traditions that could play a role in heart health.



[What We Are Doing Now]

- Patel Brothers plans to expand the use of posters about heart disease risk and heart-healthy grocery choices beyond its flagship Chicago store and into other locations nationwide.
- The South Asian Cardiovascular Center offers clinical cardiovascular screenings for anyone interested in receiving specific counseling about how to make heart-healthy changes in their lifestyle.
- The Center is talking with major consulting companies that employ large numbers of South Asians to hold town hall-style lectures at work sites. The Center also is seeking ways to put such lectures and discussions available on the web.