Confucius Institute and Asian Heritage Society join China lymphoma awareness project

The Asian Heritage Society and the Confucius Institute of SDSU are working with internationally known journalist Jamie Reno to raise awareness of the alarming rise of lymphoma in China.

“Hope Begins: The China Lymphoma Project” is the idea of former longtime, award-winning Newsweek correspondent Jamie Reno, himself a three-time survivor of stage IV non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a blood cancer of the immune system. Reno was first diagnosed in 1996.

“As a young, healthy, non-smoking athlete, I knew very little about lymphoma. But I learned quickly when my oncologist told me I’d be lucky to live three years,” recalled Reno. “I was determined to prove him wrong. And I have. Today, 19 years later, I’m thankfully still alive and well. The sun is still shining for me and my family. But it’s been a long journey.”

Reno’s account of his journey, as well as that of others, was recounted in “Hope Begins in the Dark: Lymphoma Survivors Tell Their Exclusive Life Stories,” which has become the most widely read book ever written about lymphoma. For the project, Reno is writing an all-new version of the book and having it translated in Chinese. It will include new stories by lymphoma survivors living in China.

The Confucius Institute, founded and directed by Dr. Lilly Cheng, is serving as a platform to engage the Chinese and Chinese American public, while the Asian Heritage Society will help in fundraising and marketing. The Institute is also translating material and announcements for audiences in China and Dr. Cheng is helping establish protocol with potential supporters in that country.
“For the most part, the people in China, the world’s most populated country, still believe a lymphoma diagnosis means death. But that is simply not true. I just want to change that false perception among my friends in China who are suffering,” explained Reno. “When I was diagnosed...my fear was engendered by my lack of knowledge about this type of cancer. I was in the dark. I really thought I was going to die. No one with this disease should have to go through that.”

Reno, citing sources at some of China’s most prestigious cancer hospitals, said that while the incidence of lymphoma in China is rapidly rising, little is known of the disease. “I just want to help people get through what I’ve already been through and show them they are stronger and better than their cancer,” Reno said.

While Reno’s cancer has returned twice, he has still managed to gain control over his health by participating in trials involving new pharmaceutical products tackling the disease and by adopting a strict regimen of exercise and diet. In writing about the disease over the years, he has also enlisted the backing of several drug companies and specialists in the field, among them Dr. Stephen Nimer, a renowned lymphoma and leukemia expert, and Dr. Tony Hunter, director of the Salk Institute Cancer Center, who will address the project’s official launch Jan. 26 of next year at the Sanford Consortium for Regenerative Medicine in La Jolla.

Said Reno: “The project mission is simple: Inform and inspire lymphoma patients and their families in China, where this disease is increasing, and expand global awareness of what lymphoma is, what the latest treatments are, and what is coming soon.

“This project will save lives. And what could me more important than that?”

Anyone interested in learning how you may help can contact Reno at jreno@san.rr.com or the Asian Heritage Society at event@asianheritageawards.com.