

Zutshi Foundation aims to fight use of OTC drugs

GEORGE JOSEPH

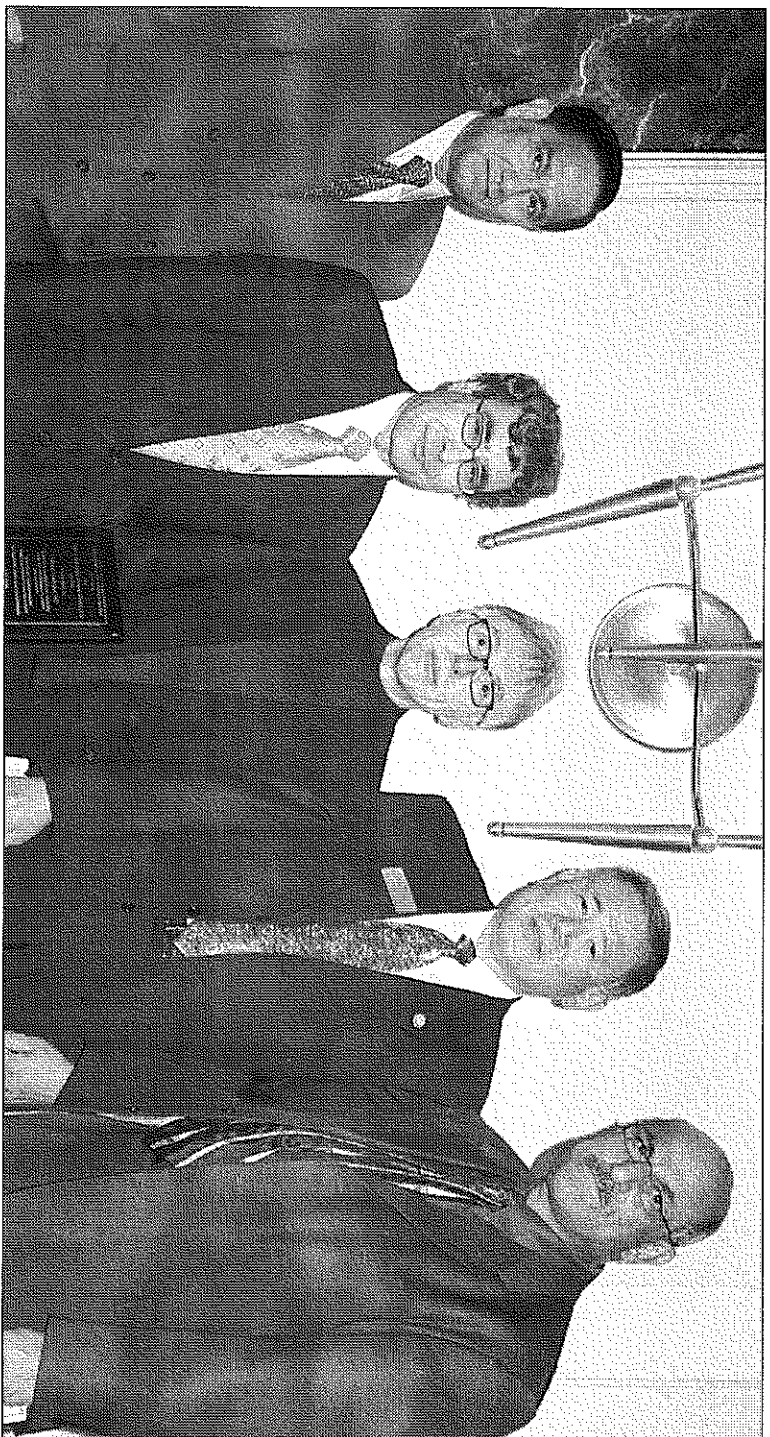
A personal tragedy for Jeevan Zutshi, founder of the Indo-American Community Federation, turned into a talking point for the Unity Dinner '08 held at the Newark Fremont Hilton in California.

Less than two months ago, his elder son Amit Zutshi, who was 30, died. The family believes his death was a result of overusing over-the-counter health supplements. The shocked family decided to create awareness about the problem, setting up the Amit Zutshi Foundation to help children.

The 7th Annual Unity Dinner, a signature event of the IACF, was attended by among others, US Representative Pete Stark; John Garamendi, the state lieutenant governor; Dr. Leland Yee, state senator; Pete McHugh, Santa Clara county supervisor; Scott Haggerty and Nate Miley, both Alameda County supervisors; Alberto Torrico and Mary Hayashi, both assembly members; and the mayors of Fremont, Hayward, Milpitas, Union City. Congressman Stark gave \$1,000 for the new foundation.

'It is about awareness. It is about helping other parents. It is about saving our youth,' said Jeevan Zutshi. 'A major issue of concern that I share regarding our health care system is Big Pharma's free hand to disperse high profit pharmaceuticals and over-the-counter dietary supplements to as many people as possible, bypassing doctors entirely often times without genuine concern for consumer welfare.'

'Unfortunately, dietary supplements and weight-loss aids aren't subject to the same rigorous standards as are prescription drugs or medications sold over-the-counter. Thus, they can be marketed with limited proof of effectiveness or safety,' he said. Vendors can make health claims about products based on their own review and interpretation of studies without FDA authorization. However, the FDA can pull a product off the market if it is proved to be dangerous, which often occurs after many people are affected. For the consumer, there are assortments of supplements to choose from, many claiming to be natural, herbal remedies. But it is hard to know what the customer is getting, even if the ingredients listed match what's in the bottle, speakers said.



Many weight-loss pills contain a cocktail of ingredients - some with more than 20 herbs, vitamins, minerals or other add-ons like caffeine or laxatives. How these ingredients interact individually and collectively with the body is largely unknown. Using them can be a risky venture, especially if one is taking other medications, they said.

'The dietary supplement industry perpetuates delusions about perfection; they market an unhealthy ideal. To further complicate matters, our health care system has not kept pace with this billion dollar market,' Zutshi noted.

Many physicians are not trained in accurately diagnosing illnesses resulting from a lifestyle captivated by instant gratification. This often times leads to misdiagnoses of illnesses from over the counter supplements, as infirmities associated with obsessive compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder or bipolar disorder.

'The struggle of our youth is often ignored, particularly [those of] immigrants, to combat peer pressure and body

■ Dr. Vin Sawhney, second from left, who was honored by the IACF Founder Jeevan Zutshi, and other guests

image issues projected by the media and society. We must tackle this rising epidemic by not only training medical professionals but also holding accountable the supplement manufacturers and distribution centers, such as gyms and fitness clubs,' Zutshi added.

Zutshi's friend Sharan Dhanoa, cousin Rudra and Dr. Krishna Reddy, founder of the Indo American Friendship Council, joined Zutshi's son Rahul, Amit's younger brother, in inaugurating the Foundation. US Representative Frank Pallone (Democrat, New Jersey) and Stark included the names of Amit Zutshi and the foundation in Congressional records.

Awards were presented to Dr. Vin Sawhney, former AAPI president, attorney Mohinder Mann and county supervisor Haggerty.

'The Indo American Community Federation is dedicated to further the cause of education in the truest sense of the word.

We are determined to take on hot button issues, specifically those which we believe can be alleviated through proper education,' said Shashi Sharma, current president of the 12-year-old non-profit organization, which was set up to showcase Indian culture and get people of Indian origin involved in mainstream issues.

'Our Unity Dinners are a demonstrable reminder of the importance of maintaining the cohesion we as a community cultivate and the meaningful friendships that we continue to form,' said Dr. Nareesh Sharma, a director of the organization.

Amit Zutshi died March 19 after living all his life in Fremont. He worked with Microsoft and later with an e-commerce company in Santa Clara. He was very active in Barack Obama's campaign. The foundation set up in his name also plans to help children in need and for parents' rights. Currently, parents are not legally able to force their children to get treatment.