

An Aiea woman fights fibromyalgia

BY EMILY VIGLIELMO

Most people have never heard of fibromyalgia, but Aiea resident Joanne Chun is working to raise awareness about the illness which affects her.

According to Dr. R. Paul St. Amand, who has been on the teaching staff at the Los Angeles Harbor/UCLA Hospital's Department of Endocrinology for more than four decades, fibromyalgia refers to a condition of pain in the muscles and fibers.

Symptoms include muscular pain, fatigue, bladder infections, insomnia, hypoglycemia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and irritable bowel or bladder syndrome.

Dr. Amand discovered guaifenesin's use as a treatment for fibromyalgia, and his work is frequently cited. Chun said she read Dr. Amand's books and has been on guaifenesin for about four years.

"It's an inexpensive medication and it has helped me out so so much. You find it in Robitussin," Chun explained. "My condition is fairly mild. There are people who are in much more pain than I am."

On the second Saturday of every month, Chun and others attend a support group for fibromyalgia sufferers at St. Clement's Church near Punahou School. The support group, which formed in 2000, is planning a reunion luncheon at 11 a.m. on July 8 at the Plaza Hotel. Cost is \$20.

Chun said one of those who was most instrumental in founding the support group — and raising awareness about the illness — is Waipio Gentry resident Annette Kam.

"The group wanted to thank Annette," Chun said. "She's helped thousands of people, even in other countries. She's really the one who keeps us going."

Kam said guaifenesin and Dr. Amand's protocol for treating fibromyalgia "have definitely changed my life." The physician also has written many books, including "What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Fibromyalgia."

"Having fibromyalgia means many things change, and a lot of them are invisible," Dr. Amand states in the tome. "Unlike having cancer or being hurt in an accident, most people do not understand even a little about (this illness) and its effects."

Since 2001, Kam said that the fibromyalgia support group has received approximately 1,000 referrals from medical doctors and massage therapists who treat patients with chronic pain.

Both Chun and Kam stressed, however, that there is no cure for the illness.

Both women say they are "in reversal," due to changes in lifestyle, diet and medication. For example, for the hypoglycemia, Chun said she must stay away from carbohydrates, sugar and caffeine.

For more information on fibromyalgia, the support group or its reunion, call Chun at 488-3953 or Kam at 677-8770.



Emily Viglielmo file photo

Joanne Chun of Aiea, at left, and Waipio Gentry resident Annette Kam both have a painful condition known as fibromyalgia. Chun is helping to organize a July 8 reunion for members of a fibromyalgia support group.