




## Director's Message

Dear OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Team,

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among U.S. women and the second leading cause of death among women after lung cancer. One in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime. The risk for breast cancer increases with age, with most breast cancers diagnosed after age 50.

When breast cancer is detected early, and is in the localized stage, the 5-year relative survival rate is

... continued on page 3

## Peer-to-Peer

# Loveana Fischer

"I work with others, using conventional things in an unconventional manner. People rarely understand what I do. I just say I am additional support to the clinic and those who visit and work here." As a Mental Health Worker I, Peer-to-Peer

recipient, **Loveana Fischer** aims at providing comfort for patients at the OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Behavioral Health Services (BHS) outpatient clinic in Aliso Viejo. "I am proud of the people that I work with. Having a

supportive team with same goals, helping others. I would like to continue to connect with people and decrease the mental health stigma and increase the awareness on mental health wellness."

At the clinic, Loveana spends her time at the Clubhouse, a "Safe Place" for incoming patients

waiting to see their doctors. The space includes arts and crafts, movies, music, and mental health workers such as Loveana, to talk to. With her charm and positivity, her job is to create comfort in a seemingly tense environment.

As Loveana puts it, simply "being

there," is her job. "My role includes many things such as advocating for participants, greeting clinic visitors, providing resources, creating a calm atmosphere, facilitating peer led groups and activities, creating a monthly calendar,

creating a monthly newsletter, and assisting front office staff with translating. I also help front office staff when needed, providing additional support when a first time visitor has anxieties and fears, providing information on coping skills, and providing information on illness symptoms to



## FEATURED ARTICLES

Suicide Prevention Week and Month .....	2
2021 Annual OC Community Behavioral Health Summit .....	4
Tips for a Safe Halloween During COVID-19 .....	8
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Cultural Spotlight .....	9



# SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK AND MONTH

**T**he Orange County Board of Supervisors (Board) proclaimed September 5-11 as Suicide Prevention Week and September as Suicide Prevention Month. In its proclamation, the Board said it, “prioritized suicide prevention by establishing the Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP) to support and expand countywide suicide prevention efforts,” and urged all Orange County (OC) residents, “to play a role in suicide prevention and promote mental health and wellness as we strive towards zero suicides.”

During the Board presentation, **Dr. Clayton Chau**, OC Health Care Agency (HCA) Director and County Health Officer thanked families and those who speak out for youngsters. “Let us celebrate life. I know it’s difficult to see hope, but services are available and treatments are effective. I urge everyone to know what’s available and to encourage their use. For all the youngsters living with mental illness or suicidal thoughts, I want to give you hope. I’ve been there, I got treatment and I recovered. Get treatment, don’t let anyone shame you or

stigmatize you. Reach out to someone, to family or a friend. And please call (800) 273-TALK (Suicide Prevention Hotline).”

Suicide is something that has touched many as noted by **Dr. Jeffrey Nagel**, OC Behavioral Health Director. “I want to thank the Board for their support on this resolution, for creating the Office of Suicide Prevention, and for their support throughout the years. I want to break the myth that talking to someone who is suicidal will make them become more suicidal. The opposite is true. If you know someone who is struggling, don’t hesitate to reach out and to talk to them. And know where to access resources.”

And there are several suicide prevention action items underway said **Bhuvana Rao**, Division Manager, OSP. “We really want to raise awareness about suicide prevention in Orange County. It’s never too early to have those conversations with someone who might be struggling. While this is such a serious topic, we never want to lose hope and the most important message, for anyone who

## Director's Message

continued from page 1

99%. Early detection includes doing monthly breast self-exams, and scheduling regular clinical breast exams and mammograms. Many breast cancer symptoms are invisible and not noticeable without a professional screening, but some symptoms can be caught early just by being proactive about your breast health.

I encourage you to visit [nationalbreastcancer.org](https://www.nationalbreastcancer.org) to learn more about the causes of breast cancer, and how to be proactive with early detection and healthy habits to reduce your risk of getting breast cancer.

As the fall season begins, I also want to encourage you and your loved ones over the age of six months to get vaccinated against influenza, also known as the seasonal flu. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) and [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.aap.org), **influenza vaccines can be safely co-administered with COVID-19 vaccines for both eligible children and adults.**

Last year, we saw very low numbers of flu cases, most likely due to the mitigation measures that were in place to avoid the spread of COVID-19 including mask wearing, social distancing, and remote working and learning. Now that people are returning to normal activities, and due to reduced population immunity from low virus activity since the COVID-19 pandemic started, we may see an early and higher prevalence of influenza this year.

Many of us have already experienced a great deal of stress with COVID-19 alone, so let us not also worry about the flu, too. If you are not yet vaccinated for either COVID-19 or the flu, please know that you can receive both the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time.

The flu season typically lasts from October through May. The virus constantly changes, which means people can get infected with the flu every year. Like COVID-19, the best way to prevent the flu is through vaccination. You can get the flu vaccine by asking your doctor, visiting your health care provider, or going to a local pharmacy or clinic. For more information on flu shots in Orange County, visit [ohealthinfo.com/flu](https://ohealthinfo.com/flu).

Stay Well,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clayton Chau MD, PHD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Dr. Clayton Chau, MD, PHD**

HCA Director and County Health Officer

is struggling or if you know of someone who is struggling, is that it is never too early to have those conversations.” Dr. Rao encouraged everyone to get familiar with the signs by going to [www.suicideispreventable.org](https://www.suicideispreventable.org). “The signs are subtle, but they are there. When people are struggling, they really are trying to reach out. We can all play a part in suicide prevention by understanding those signs and reaching out to someone who might be struggling.”

# 2021 ANNUAL OC COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUMMIT

*The OC Health Care Agency (HCA), in partnership with the Long Beach Veterans Administration (VA) Health Care System (HCS), held another successful Annual Orange County Community Behavioral Summit on September 24, 2021. The theme of this year's conference was "Resilience" with all of the sessions focused on improving the resilience of Veterans through innovative practices. Several community partners joined the HCA and the VA in support of the annual summit, including:*

- Strength in Support
- Orange County Veterans and Military Families Collaborative (OCVMFC)
- California National Guard, Mental Health Division
- Strong Families Strong Children
- Human Options
- Veterans Legal Institute
- Jamboree Housing

The Annual OC Community Behavioral Health (BH) Summit provides an opportunity to engage in active dialogue on how we can address the needs of our Veterans and their families and also seek collaborative support for those needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health safety, we shifted our in-person event to a virtual event using WebEx as our virtual host. The 2021 Community BH Summit focused on building resilience through connection with others, highlighting resources and intervention strategies the following available to support Orange County Veterans and their families.

The 2021 Community BH summit included two keynote speakers and four 75-minute breakout sessions. Each breakout session offered two training options for the attendees. **Dr. Clayton Chau**, the Director of the HCA, was our morning keynote speaker, speaking to the impact of COVID-19 on Veteran mental health. Dustin Thompson, the Chief Experience Officer for the Long Beach VA HCS, was our afternoon keynote speaker, speaking to the importance of communication in advocating for personal needs. The keynotes and presentations were as follows:

## Morning Keynote Address

COVID-19 and Mental Health, Clayton Chau, M.D., Ph.D. (HCA)

## Breakout Session One

- Implementing Best Practices in Suicide Prevention, Jarod Rouch Ph.D. (LB VA HCS)
- VA Whole Health Approach to Care, Lia Kramer, Ph.D (LB VA HCS), Sonika Ung, Ph.D. (LB VA HCS)

## Breakout Session Two

- Supporting Veteran Families in a Time of Crisis: Strengthening Partnerships to Improve Family Outcomes, Mitzi Huff, Larisa Owens Ph.D., Jacob Lampe ACSW, Rubi Lara, (Strong Families Strong Children), Sara Behmerwohld, Esq., (Human Options), Antionette Balta Esq., LL.M, (Veterans Legal Institute)
- Identifying and Lifting Barriers to Integrating Medication-Assisted Therapies, Ricardo Restrepo-Guzman, M.D., MPH (LB VA HCS)

# ORAL HEALTH SUMMIT

Contributors: **Kevin Alexander**, Service Chief II  
**Dr. Michael Mullard**, Behavioral Health Clinician II

## Afternoon Keynote Address

- No, Really, How are you?, Dustin Thompson, MA (LB VA HCS)

## Breakout Session Three

- The Transition from Active Duty to VA for Service Members with Serious Mental Illness, Laura Marrone, M.D., Sterling Atkins M.D., Robyn Coughlin, LCSW, BCD, Anne Vermillion, RN, BSN, RNC (LB VA HCS)
- Veteran Homelessness: A Pathway to Functional Zero in Orange County, Richard Owens (Jamboree Housing)

## Breakout Session Four

- Coming Out of COVID-19 and Learning to Virtually Address the “New Isolation,” Robert Stohr, MS, LMFT, (U.S. Veterans Initiative)
- Finding Comfort in our Vices, Connie Thomas, MA, LMFT (Strength in Support)

We wish to thank everyone who presented, participated and planned the event. Special thanks to HCA staff: **Dr. K.C. Pickering**, Service Chief I; **Stella Dang**, Information Processing Specialist; **Christy Ortega**, Office Specialist; **Shelby St. Clair** and **Brittany Whetsell**, Office Technicians; and **Allyson Palas**, Research Analyst IV.

We look forward to next year’s conference which will be in September 2022.



## Community Suicide Prevention Initiative

At the direction of the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the Community Suicide Prevention Initiative will bring together the Orange County community for a two-day conference on suicide prevention. See below for information. To register click [here](#).

## BE WELL TOGETHER:

### Community Action for Suicide Prevention

A virtual 2-day conference will bring together the Orange County community to raise awareness and share resources on suicide prevention.

October 14-15, 2021

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

No Cost Event

### Keynote Speakers:

Day 1: Keris Myrick, MS, MBA, Director at the Jed Foundation; Co-Director of The Mental Health Strategic Impact Initiative

Day 2: Dr. Christine Moutier, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

## Join Us at the “Out of the Darkness Walk”

October 16 from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Community Suicide Prevention Initiative funded by: The OC Health Care Agency (OCHCA), Behavioral Health Services, Prevention & Intervention, Mental Health Services ACT/Prop 63

For a time of healing and awareness, we invite all conference attendees to join us at the AFSP Out of the Darkness Orange County California Walk at Saddleback Church, virtually, or in your own neighborhood.

Register at: [afsp.org/orangecountywalk](https://afsp.org/orangecountywalk)

# SUICIDE PREVENTION & ANGELS BASEBALL

Contributor: **Julia Mayuga**, Communications Intern



**Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) and Angels Baseball teamed up to promote suicide prevention in September. Before a game at The Big A, Office of Suicide Prevention Director, **Dr. Bhuvana Rao** sat down with Angels host Kent French to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Month. You can watch the 90-second interview by clicking [here](#). The full

3-minute interview is also available [here](#).

“Stigma continues to surround the topic of suicide,” Dr. Rao says. She hopes “the collaboration with the Angels will normalize conversations surrounding suicide that may seem taboo.” Suicide prevention, as Dr. Rao states, “is a balance between pain and hope. It’s important to provide reasons for living and emotional support to those afflicted from suicide.”

Fans can go to [suicideispreventable.org](https://suicideispreventable.org) to learn more about recognizing warning signs, starting a conversation, and the steps you can take to create a safe environment for

## 5 Things You Need to Know About

**1** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur. Numerous variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are being tracked in the United States and globally during this pandemic. Read more on variants [here](#).

Reference:

1. Monitoring Incidence of COVID-19 Cases, Hospitalizations, and Deaths, by Vaccination Status — 13 U.S. Jurisdictions, April 4–July 17, 2021 Early Release / September 10, 2021 / 70; [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7037e1.htm?s\\_cid=mm7037e1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7037e1.htm?s_cid=mm7037e1_w)

**2** There are three classes of variants according to the US government SARS-CoV-2 Interagency Group (SIG). Variants of Interest; Variants of Concern; and Variants of High Consequence. You can read more about the classifications [here](#).

**3** The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) tracks COVID-19 variants in Orange County (OC). You can find the data by clicking on the blue and yellow Desktop Version and Mobile Version dashboard links [here](#). The data is updated on Thursdays.

your loved ones.

The HCA continues working with community partners on suicide prevention. A two-day conference is scheduled for anyone who wants to learn more about suicide prevention. The virtual conference will be on October 14 and 15. The event will end with an “Out of Darkness” Walk, sponsored by the American Foundation to Suicide Prevention on October 16. See [page 5](#) for more information.

If you or anyone you know is in need of assistance, please call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK (8255).

**Peer-to-Peer**  
*continued from page 1*

raise awareness.”

Lorena has also been active during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the COVID-19 vaccine was released, Lorena spent time at the Joplin Youth Camp where homeless individuals were voluntarily protected from the virus. She assisted with providing stimulus checks, food stamp benefits and connecting clients to mental health services, education and job-skill training. During a six-month deployment, Lorena joined the County of Orange’s mass vaccine initiative at several point of dispensing (POD) sites. She served most of the time at Santa Ana College where she accommodated individuals who were anxious and hesitant about receiving the vaccine. Lorena called these, “opportunities to be of service to the greater public. I am honored at being able to be part of such an incredible experience.”

When asked what’s the best part of her job, Lorena said it was being inspired by those she works with and those she serves. “I admire my colleagues and how genuine services are being provided at this site and the regard for the well-being of those who come in through these doors. Those characteristics are what makes me proud to work for the HCA.”

Contributor: **Julia Mayuga**, Communications Intern

# ut: COVID-19 VARIANTS

**4** As of mid-September the Delta variant was the most widespread in OC. The CDC says the Delta variant spreads faster and is more than two times as contagious as previous variants. The HCA provided information on the Delta variant which you can read [here](#). You can also sign up to receive information from the CDC on variants by entering your email [here](#). (Note the CDC offers 282 publications for subscription.)

**5** “When it comes to reducing the risk of contracting COVID-19 and variants such as Delta, the best action one can take is to get vaccinated and continue following public health precautions,” said **Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong** (Dr. CK), County Deputy Health Officer. “Studies continue to show that all authorized COVID-19 vaccines in the US are highly effective in preventing hospitalization and death,” said Dr. CK. A recent study showed that after Delta became the most common variant, fully vaccinated people had reduced risk of infection five-fold, and had reduced risk of hospitalization and death over ten-fold compared to unvaccinated<sup>1</sup>. For the Delta variant, the risk of breakthrough infections in vaccinated people is low, and when it does occur, the infectious period appears to be shorter and symptoms are milder compared to unvaccinated people.



# Tips for a Safe Halloween

## During COVID-19

Halloween is a holiday enjoyed by adults and children alike. It's a great time to encourage nutritious snacking, physical activity and focus on safety. However, with COVID-19, additional safety measures should be put in place to have a happy and safe Halloween. Here are a few reminders for COVID-19 safety:

- **Keep your Distance:** Trick-or-Treating can sometimes lead to crowds when walking or waiting for candy to be handed out. Keep your distance from others who are not part of your household.
- **Wear a Mask:** There are so many creative costumes for Halloween. Substitute your regular mask with a festive Halloween themed cloth mask that matches your costume. Your Halloween cloth mask should be constructed of two or more breathable fabric layers, cover your nose and mouth, fit snugly against your face with no gaps, and have a nose wire to prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask.
- **Play it Safe:** Instead of Trick-or-Treating in the neighborhood, create a daytime-outdoor scavenger hunt, haunted play area, or Halloween-themed early outdoor dinner for your family.
- **Giving Candy:** Distribute candy outside by setting up a station with individually wrapped candies or goodie bags for Trick or Treaters to grab and take to go while adhering to social distancing.

**In addition to taking steps to be COVID-safe, the following are a few additional tips to keep in mind as you celebrate:**

- **Walk Safely:** Encourage children to walk and not run to avoid slips and falls. When crossing neighborhood streets or intersections, obey traffic signals and look both ways before crossing. Put electronic devices down and keep your head up while walking to prevent trips and be aware of cars that are turning or backing up.
- **Drive Safely:** Prime trick-or-treating hours are between 5:30 to 9:30

p.m. Be especially alert for pedestrians who may be walking, riding their bikes or skateboarding during these times. Plan your drive accordingly to anticipate heavy pedestrian traffic and be cautious when entering and exiting neighborhoods or residences.

- **Additional Tips:** Wear reflective gear, walk with a group of your family members and carry a flashlight to see and so others can see you. Plan ahead to review the route you anticipate taking. Have kids carry glow sticks to help them be seen by drivers.
- **Vaccinations:** Vaccines are widely available, and more groups are now eligible for vaccination. You can find a vaccine location [here](#).

For a few extra trick-or-treating safety tips, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Halloween Health and Safety tips website [here](#).



# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:

## Cultural Spotlight

Contributor: **Dr. Bhuvana Rao**, Director, Office of Suicide Prevention

**D**iwali, meaning “rows of lighted lamps,” is a Hindu-originated “festival of lights” celebrated in India and by the Indian diaspora across the world. During the five-day celebration, clay lamps known as diyas are lit to symbolize the inner light that protects from spiritual darkness. This festival is one of the most important celebrations for people of the Hindu, Sikh and Jain faiths, along with the Indian immigrant communities in the United States (US) as well.

Diwali typically coincides with harvest and new year celebrations. It’s a festival of new beginnings, and the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. People celebrate the festival by decorating their homes with oil lamps, candles, lights, flowers, and rangoli, which are colorful and elaborate floor designs. There’s an exchanging of gifts and sweets, and Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, is worshipped as the bringer of blessings for the new year. This year Diwali begins on Tuesday, November 2 and lasts for five days, with the main day of celebrations taking place on Saturday, November 6. For this year’s Diwali celebration, various temples and places of worship will conduct online puja, a ceremonial prayer that offers fruits and flowers to Hindu deities.

Diwali celebrations have become much more mainstream in the US. Prior to COVID-19, Diwali celebrations in Orange County have occurred in the City of Irvine and at the Disney California Adventure Park in Anaheim as part of a festival of holidays at the theme park and included performances of traditional Indian dances and a Bollywood dance party. Many other US cities have hosted celebrations including San Francisco, New York City, San Antonio and Seattle.

Diwali has mythological origins and carries different meanings for the different religious communities and has many local interpretations regionally in India as well. Some Hindus recognize it as the day represented in the classic Hindu epic, Ramayana, when the protagonists,

Rama and Sita, arrive back home in Ayodhya after 14 years of exile; Diwali is often celebrated as the day of their return. In South India, many Hindus mark Diwali as the day lord Krishna defeated the demon Narakasura and thereby freed the 16,000 girls in his captivity. In Western India, many Hindu and Jain communities consider Diwali the first day of the new year.

Regardless, Diwali celebrates the triumph of righteousness, represented by light. Happy Diwali to our OC Health Care Agency colleagues who celebrate.

*The **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion** column reflects the OC Health Care Agency’s commitment to celebrate the diversity of our workforce. It will also include information on our continuing efforts to develop diversity, equity, and inclusion as core components of the work we do in service to the community. Employees are welcome to contribute ideas and stories that help create a more inclusive and equitable workplace, which recognizes and values all backgrounds, voices, roles and contributions. Ideas can be submitted to: [hcacomm@ochca.com](mailto:hcacomm@ochca.com).*

# Leveraging Your Benefits



## Mental Illness Awareness Week



Find support

Español

Search

24/7 Confidential support

1-800-221-0945, TTY: 711

Life & relationships

Mental health & addictions

Resource centers

Career & workplace

Tools

Services

Welcome County of Orange

## Talk Saves Lives online training

Take this free training to learn ways you can support someone at risk of suicide. You could even save a life.

[Learn more](#)



## Create your personal account

Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) runs from October 3-9, 2021. The MIAW theme is, "Together for Mental Health." For more click [here](#).

There are resources and services available to OC Health Care Agency employees, dependents and the Orange County community. The National Alliance on Mental Illness-OC has resources [here](#). County of Orange employees can access resources through Aetna's [www.resourcesforliving.com](http://www.resourcesforliving.com).

The Resources for Living website includes support, training, assessments, setting up a personal account to match your interests and more.

*Information in "Leveraging Your Benefits" is to make you aware of benefits available to you as a County of Orange employee. This is not an endorsement of any program.*

<b>VISION</b> Quality health for all.		<b>GOALS</b> Promote quality, equity, and value. Ensure the HCA's sustainability. Offer relevant services to the community.
	<b>MISSION</b> In partnership with the community, deliver sustainable and responsive services that promote population health and equity.	

## Connect with Us



The **What's Up** newsletter is created and distributed monthly by HCA Communications. We welcome your ideas, input and/or insight into HCA people and programs. To contribute, comment or connect please email us at [hccomm@ochca.com](mailto:hccomm@ochca.com) or call (714) 834-2178. Thank you!