

# No Punishment for the Innocent

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Southeast Asian refugees have been fighting prejudice since the day they began arriving in Orange County in the mid-1970s.

First the issue was the rising rate of tuberculosis among immigrants in the county. That prompted unfounded fears, although in epidemiological reality those cases posed no major public health problem or threat to the overall community; a Health Department report found no evidence that immigrants were transmitting tuberculosis to the general public.

Then came baseless rumors that refugees were getting special treatment in the often-bitter competition for jobs, job-training program openings and other forms of public assistance. That brought distrust and discord between refugees and other minorities and poor people.

And now we have the arrests of 51 Vietnamese physicians and pharmacists as part of a statewide crackdown on alleged Medi-Cal abuses by Indochinese refugees, and the suspension of 21 Orange County and 33 Los Angeles County physicians—most of them Indochinese—from a nutrition program on grounds that they submitted inaccurate data to allow patients to obtain food stamps.

Refugees in Orange County are worried again. They are understandably afraid that many people will judge the entire Vietnamese community of about 65,000 by what a few of them might have done.

To make such a blanket judgment would indeed be unfair. But the refugees' fears are reasonable,

considering the problems and prejudices that they have encountered since they arrived here, and what the Orange County Human Relations Commission once cited as California's "history of anti-Asian sentiment" dating back to the 19th-Century immigration of Chinese.

To counteract what the refugees dread may be "... emotional reactions which may lead to prejudices," representatives of 41 Vietnamese religious, social, professional and business organizations from Orange and Los Angeles counties formed a coalition to urge that "the American public ... not judge the whole Vietnamese community through the unworthy actions of a few." We join in that plea.

The refugee community in Orange County is building an enviable record of industriousness. With more than 400 businesses owned by Vietnamese, Orange County has become the largest Vietnamese business center in the nation. And Indochinese students have been excelling in academics in numbers far greater than their proportion in the student body. Their presence has had a positive effect.

What must be remembered is that it was refugees who first reported cases of medical abuses—as any citizen should. They have expressed faith in the American judicial system. Not all doctors involved in fraud and abuse are refugees. But when refugees are accused of wrongdoing, all refugees often suffer. It shouldn't be that way. Under American justice the guilty, not the innocent, should be punished.