



NIH AWARDS

UH CANCER CENTER RESEARCHERS

\$2.8M TO STUDY LUNG
CANCER DISPARITIES

STORY ON PAGE 4 



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII
CANCER CENTER

With concerns about the coronavirus here in Hawai'i and beyond, these are troubling times. While we grapple with these health concerns, I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your past and ongoing support of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center. For many of you, the current crisis will evoke memories of dealing with cancer yourselves, or in loved members of your family, and the uncertainties and tribulations associated with that journey. We, at the Cancer Center, are especially concerned about how the virus may impact patients with cancer who have compromised immune systems, especially those in the midst of therapy, but also for those who are survivors.

We are all focused on the immediate needs that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented to us. This has put a pause on many clinical trials activities and even some basic laboratory discoveries. We know that the long-term goal of reducing the burden of cancer will require us to get back to more research, both basic and clinical, focused on patients and in preventing cancer for those at risk. As the only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center in the Pacific, and the only center focused on the cancer problems that specifically affect our population, the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center plays a pivotal role in the fight against cancer.

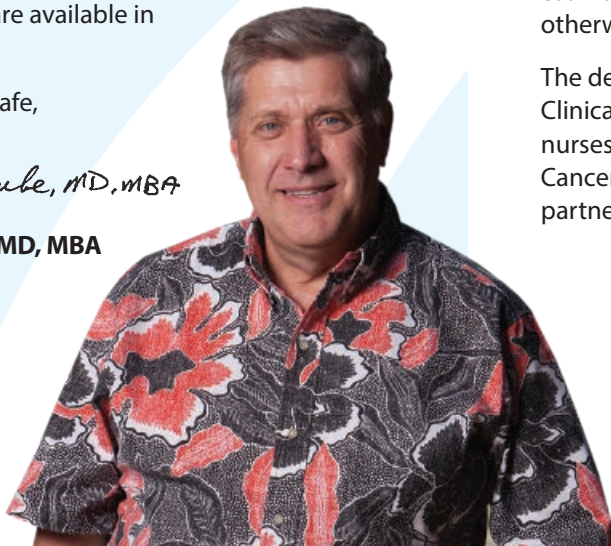
We are truly appreciative of your support and of so many of the people of Hawai'i. It has enabled us to make grand plans to combat this disease like the creation of an Early Phase Clinical Research Center, the addition of faculty members to our Population Sciences in the Pacific Program, the leadership to help ensure coverage of routine care costs for Medicaid/Med-QUEST patients enrolled on clinical trials, the studies on disparities across different racial and ethnic groups in the development of lung cancer, the enhancement to our education and career efforts, and the studies on culturally grounded prevention efforts for Native Hawaiian men.

Thank you for continuing to be a part of our Cancer Center 'ohana as we work to ensure that the best and most novel treatments, trials and prevention strategies are available in Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Mahalo Piha and stay safe,

Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA

Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA
Director



Hawai'i's first cutting-edge research clinic

The UH Cancer Center received a \$6.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to build a clinical research center that will significantly improve access to experimental treatments for cancer patients in Hawai'i. The clinic will focus on early phase clinical trials and be the first of its kind in the state.

The Early Phase Cancer Clinical Research Center will provide access to phase 1 trials for cancer patients in Hawai'i. Phase 1 trials represent the cutting edge of cancer treatments and are often considered when patients have a particularly challenging form of cancer or when standard treatments have been unsuccessful.

The federal funds match the \$6.5 million approved by the state Legislature, and the \$13 million total will be used to construct the Clinical Research Center, in 36,000 square feet of existing shell space at the UH Cancer Center in Kaka'ako.

"We are extremely grateful to the state Legislature and the NIH for recognizing the need of this program and the exceptional value it will provide for the people of Hawai'i," said UH Cancer Center Director Randall Holcombe. "The center will be focused on finding new treatments and providing them to our residents without the expense and difficulties of travel to another NCI-designated cancer center on the mainland."

Approximately 6,700 people are diagnosed with cancer each year in Hawai'i. The research center will serve an estimated 100 to 200 patients annually who would have otherwise had to travel out of state for treatment.

The development of a program in Early Phase Cancer Clinical Trials, and recruitment of the faculty physicians, nurses and pharmacists, is a joint venture of the UH Cancer Center, the University of Hawai'i and clinical partners in the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium.

Internship Program proposal wins Mānoa Provost's Strategic Investment Competition Award

The Cancer Research Internship Program proposal submitted by UH Cancer Center researchers, Gertraud Maskarinec, MD, PhD, associate director for research education, and Joe W. Ramos, PhD, deputy director, is one of the winners of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Provost's Strategic Investment Competition. The Program will offer undergraduate students the opportunity to conduct research in an interdisciplinary environment and to receive mentoring from UH Cancer Center faculty members to achieve entry into graduate school. The award expands the Cancer Center's Summer Internship Program to allow UH Mānoa students continued mentorship throughout the school year.



Gertraud Maskarinec, MD, PhD



Joe W. Ramos, PhD

The competition is designed to increase cross-unit and cross-disciplinary collaboration in strategic areas that, with start-up funding, have a strong possibility for success in building on UH Mānoa's strengths while also addressing challenges. Out of 42 collaborative proposals, 16 were selected to receive a total of \$750,000 in start-up funding.



In Memoriam, NOBORU OISHI, MD

Noboru Oishi, MD, who helped launch the UH Cancer Center, passed away on March 5, 2020 at the age of 91, at his home in South Lake Tahoe, California. Born on Kaua'i and raised on O'ahu, Oishi was the first fellowship-trained hematologist/oncologist in Hawai'i, where he established a successful practice, taught students of the John A. Burns School of Medicine, and conducted clinical research. He was very involved in the Southwest Oncology Group, an organization that conducted research and clinical trials, through which he made key contributions that led to improved oncologic care for patients in Hawai'i.

MEET THE **NEW** FACULTY MEMBERS

OF THE POPULATION
SCIENCES IN THE
PACIFIC PROGRAM!



ALEXANDRA BINDER, PHD, joined the UH Cancer Center as an assistant researcher in November 2019. Prior to joining the Cancer Center, she was an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, Fielding School of Public Health. Her current research focuses on the developmental origins of health and disease, environmental influences on pubertal development, life-course epigenetics, biological aging and cancer risk.



S. LANI PARK, PHD, was appointed as an associate researcher at the UH Cancer Center in January 2020. Park received her PhD in cancer epidemiology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and did her post-doctoral fellowship at the UH Cancer Center. Park's research interests include cancer epidemiology, lung cancer epidemiology and cancer disparities.



Lambert Leong

NASA offers internship to graduate research assistant

Lambert Leong, a graduate research assistant at the UH Cancer Center and graduate student, Department of Molecular Biosciences and Bioengineering in the UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, was selected to participate in a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) internship program.

“I am excited for what I will learn, and I hope to continue to build our relationship and collaboration with NASA. I know that I will learn a lot, and gain a lot of experience, which I will bring back to the UH Cancer Center so that we can better our body shape solutions for Hawai‘i’s diverse population,” Leong said.

Leong will work with the Anthropometry and Musculoskeletal Laboratories within NASA’s Human Systems Academy on the project, “Body Shape and Bone Modeling.” Through the use of 3D optical cameras and dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA), he hopes to develop methods for modeling body shape and composition. Leong will apply his new knowledge to different body composition and obesity projects at the UH Cancer Center.

Leong works in the Shepherd Research Lab conducting biomedical imaging research to better detect and monitor metabolic diseases and cancer risk.

NIH AWARDS

UH CANCER CENTER RESEARCHERS

\$2.8M TO STUDY LUNG CANCER DISPARITIES

University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center researchers, Sung-shim (Lani) Park, PhD, MPH, and Lenora Loo, PhD, were awarded a five-year \$2.8 million grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health, to study smoking-related lung cancer disparities across different racial and ethnic populations.

“This is the first study of its kind to molecularly characterize smoking-related lung cancer across different racial and ethnic groups. Lung tumor biology may be a key contributor to the disparities in lung cancer risk and survival,” said Park, study co-principal investigator and UH Cancer Center associate researcher.

Park and Loo will use data and biospecimens from the Multiethnic Cohort Study to characterize the molecular profiles of lung adenocarcinoma, the most common subtype of lung cancer, from African Americans, Japanese Americans, Latinos, Native Hawaiians and Whites.

“We hope that the findings from this study will provide new information on the biological mechanisms that contribute to the racial and ethnic disparities of lung cancer, so that new personalized treatment targets and strategies can be developed to mitigate these disparities,” said Loo, study co-principal investigator and UH Cancer Center associate researcher.

HAWAI‘I LUNG CANCER FACTS

- The **leading cause of cancer deaths** in men and women is lung cancer.
- Lung cancer is the **2nd most common cancer** for men and women.
- There are about **776 cases of lung cancer each year**.

UH Cancer Center Hawai‘i Tumor Registry

Ho‘ōla

WORKING TO FIND THE CURE

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President's Message

Aloha, friends and supporters of the UH Cancer Center!

I am privileged and humbled to step into the role of president of the Friends of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center board this year. Like many of you, my life has been touched by cancer, with family and friends who are survivors, and also by loss.

Presently, our hope for the health and wellness of everyone in our community goes out to all during these challenging times of COVID-19. Each of us needs to do our part to overcome this challenge in the short and long term.

However, we also know that the important work of the UH Cancer Center cannot stop, even during times like these. The more I learn about the work of the Cancer Center and its passionate researchers and staff, the more I feel the need to join the fight to end cancer. Going forward, here's how we can all participate:

- **EDUCATION** – Knowing what we can each do to lower our own cancer risk and also understanding available resources when cancer does strike is vital for our health. The Friends sponsors newsletters, symposiums and events for those purposes.
- **CLINICAL TRIALS** - Participating in clinical trials supports research and moves us closer to cancer prevention and cures. I just joined the National Cancer Institute's TMIST (Tomosynthesis Mammographic Imaging Screening Trial) to help researchers learn about the best ways to find breast cancer. As a mother with a daughter and numerous nieces, I am excited to be able to do something that might make a difference in their and many other lives.
- **FINANCIAL** – Your donation to the Friends enables us to fund initiatives that support the UH Cancer Center, its clinical trial participants and summer interns, and many others in our community.

You can learn more about what we do at friendsofuhcc.org. When appropriate, we hope you will consider joining the efforts in one or more of the ways above. Working together, we can beat cancer. I'm proud to participate in every way that I can!

Please stay safe and well.

Monica McLaren

Monica McLaren

President, Friends of the UH Cancer Center



Ways the Friends support the UH Cancer Center

Four Seasons Resort Hualālai's Gift

Each September a small band of Friends-supported UH Cancer Center volunteers travel to Kona to work with staff and other volunteers at the Four Seasons Resort at Hualālai's Run for Hope weekend to raise funds for cancer. Proceeds awarded from the Run for Hope weekend activities, including the Taste of Hawai'i Island Dinner and silent auction, golf and tennis tournaments, and run, netted a gift to the Friends of the UH Cancer Center totaling more than \$22,000 to benefit the Cancer Center.



UH Cancer Center volunteers at the 2019 Four Seasons Resort Hualālai Run for Hope, pose with cases of runners packets they completed.

Champion of the Year: Jami Fukui, MD

Jami Fukui, MD, UH Cancer Center assistant researcher, was one of three individuals recognized as a "Champion of the Year" for her outstanding contribution to cancer clinical trials accrual in Hawai'i. Fukui was awarded at the Hawai'i Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting in November. The Champion of the Year Awards are sponsored by the Friends to recognize cancer healthcare professionals for their outstanding conduct and promotion of clinical trials. Two others who were honored were Kelly Watanabe, PharmD, The Queen's Medical Center and Robyn Morse, CCRC, Hawai'i Pacific Health. Congratulations to all!



Jami Fukui, MD, is flanked by UH Cancer Center Clinical Trials Office Assistant Manager Jenai Umetsu and Manager Kate Bryant-Greenwood after receiving her award.

UH CANCER CENTER SUMMER INTERN ALUM WINS SCIENCE AWARD

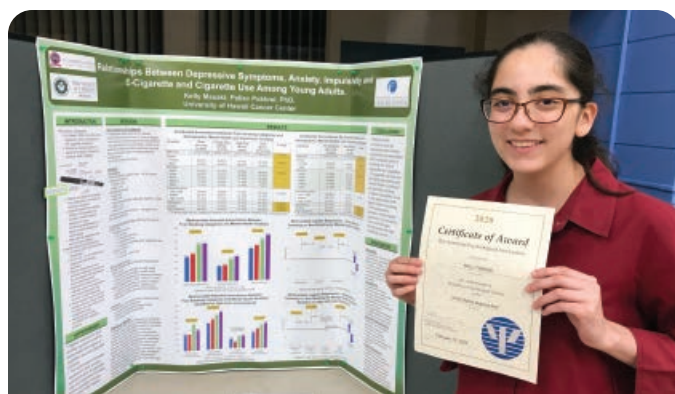
UH Cancer Center Summer Internship Program alumnus and student at St. Andrew's Schools, Kelly Masaki, received an award from the American Psychological Association (APA) at the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools' District Science Fair. Pallav Pokhrel, PhD, MPH, UH Cancer Center associate researcher, was Masaki's mentor for the study, "Relationships Between Depressive Symptoms, Anxiety, Impulsivity and E-Cigarette and Cigarette Use Among Adults".

"In Hawai'i, 29 percent of youths report feeling depressed and almost one third of college students in our study used either cigarettes or e-cigarettes, so it is an important area of study," said Masaki.

Masaki's project received an APA award for achievement in research in the psychological sciences. Her study found that mental health conditions, like anxiety and depression, were associated with increased odds of smoking. Higher impulsivity scores were also found to be associated with higher rates of smoking, and the association between mental health symptoms and smoking were found to be stronger among those with higher impulsivity scores. "Findings from our study can be used to provide

smoking prevention education for groups that need it most," said Masaki.

Masaki was selected in 2019 for a UH Cancer Center internship sponsored by the Friends. Stated Masaki, "During my internship I really enjoyed getting to know the wonderful faculty and staff of the UH Cancer Center, as well as the other interns. I have always loved science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and the internship experience confirmed that I want to have a career in a STEM field. I love coding and computers and hope to continue in research during college. After the summer program, I took a college class in statistics to learn more about the theory of the programs that I used."



Norma Nichols' legacy of support for cancer research

Norma Nichols, PhD, remained connected to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa her entire adult life. It was where she received her college education—a bachelor's degree in English, a Master's degree in art and a doctorate in American Studies.



Norma Nichols

Nichols embraced a lifelong love of the arts and nurtured and cultivated the same in her Farrington and McKinley high school students, friends, neighbors and artists through various activities spanning decades. Creation of the Norma Bird Nichols, PhD Asian Theater Endowment Fund demonstrated her support for Asian theater productions in the UH Mānoa's Department of Theatre and Dance.

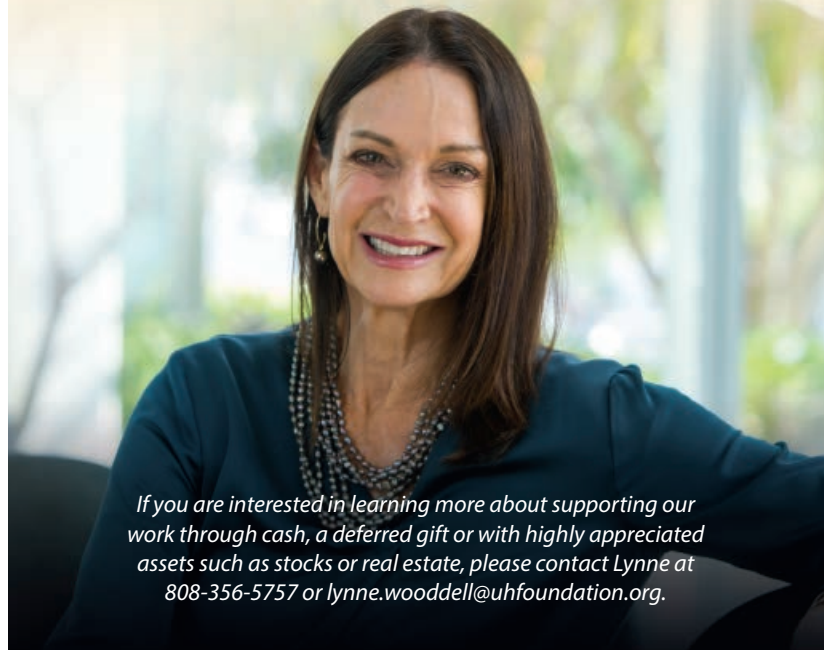
When Nichols was diagnosed with cancer, her connection to UH Mānoa was further strengthened by her oncologist, a researcher at the UH Cancer Center. Before her death in July 2018, she established the Norma Bird Nichols, PhD Fund for Innovative Clinical Research. This fund provides bridge grants, supporting researchers whose groundbreaking explorations could lead to publications and larger grants.

"While I may not see a cure in my lifetime," Nichols said, "I know that research has come a long way. I hope my gift can help these scientists make more progress, faster."

Welcome, Lynne Wooddell, director of development!

The UH Cancer Center is pleased to welcome new Director of Development, Lynne Wooddell, who brings many years of experience as a major gifts professional. Wooddell's mission for the Pacific's only National Cancer Institute-designated Cancer Center is "to inspire our generous community to support this important organization, which will ensure that cancer patients in Hawai'i have access to the most current treatments and clinical trials specific to their ethnicities and cancers."

Wooddell will lead the capital campaign to build the Early Phase Clinical Trial Research Center. She states, "Hawai'i residents deserve cutting-edge cancer research and care, right here at home. Donors are key partners to having a world-class facility supporting world-class research, and I am excited to help build these impactful relationships."



If you are interested in learning more about supporting our work through cash, a deferred gift or with highly appreciated assets such as stocks or real estate, please contact Lynne at 808-356-5757 or lynne.wooddell@uhfoundation.org.



Left to right: Corey Correa, Landmark Logistics; Randall Holcombe, UH Cancer Center; and Shirley and Drew Santos, Admor HVAC Products Inc.

CoolingCancer supports cancer research

CoolingCancer has gifted \$70,000 to support cancer research at the UH Cancer Center. Since 2013, CoolingCancer has donated more than \$300,000 raised from an annual golf tournament at Hoakalei Country Club to combat cancer.



Left to right: Recipients of ACCRUAL awards for interventional clinical trials: Wade Kyono, MD, Paul Palalay, MD, Darryl Glaser, MD, Kelley Hutchins, DO, Ashley Springer, NP, Jonathan Cho, MD, Erin Capps, MD, Laura Peterson, MD, Ian Okazaki, MD and David Tamura, MD

ACCRUAL EVENT RECOGNIZES ACHIEVEMENTS IN CLINICAL TRIALS PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENTS

The 2nd Annual Cancer Clinical Research UH Cancer Center's Accrual Leaders (ACCRUAL) event was held in January to recognize community partners—physicians, nurses and research administrators—for their achievements in enrolling patients onto clinical trials and engaging in other clinical research activities. The UH Cancer Center coordinates clinical trials through the Hawai'i Cancer Consortium with oversight of trials at The Queen's Medical Center, Hawai'i Pacific Health, Kuakini Medical Center and private oncology practices.

"We rely on our community partners to offer the best treatments possible through clinical trials," stated Jessica Rhee, MD, MS, medical director of the Cancer Center's Clinical Trials Office. "They contribute to the UH Cancer Center's 20BY25 campaign goal of increasing clinical trials enrollment of all cancer patients in Hawai'i to 20 percent by 2025."

WEINMAN SYMPOSIUM

The 11th Annual Weinman Symposium was held at the UH Cancer Center in January. Eighteen speakers from across the nation presented their research. Lewis Cantley, PhD, Tak Mak, MD, PhD and Craig Thompson, MD, each received the Weinman Award for their important discoveries in cancer cell metabolism and development of new strategies to prevent and treat cancer. The Weinman Symposium is generously supported by the Weinman Foundation.



Left to right: Barry Weinman, Virginia Weinman, Craig Thompson, MD, Lt. Gov. Josh Green, Lewis Cantley, MD, Tak Mak, MD and Michele Carbone, MD, PhD



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII
CANCER CENTER

Med-QUEST patients ensured access to cancer clinical trials

The State of Hawai'i Department of Human Services Med-QUEST Division, a patient-centric Medicaid program, worked with the UH Cancer Center to ensure access to clinical trials for cancer patients in Hawai'i. Med-QUEST issued a memorandum "to provide guidance regarding the coverage of routine costs associated with qualifying clinical trials" for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment or supportive care of cancer.

"Hawai'i was one of only a dozen states without legislation or a formal policy to provide coverage of routine care costs associated with cancer clinical trial participation for Medicaid beneficiaries, who make up about one quarter of the state's population and over 40 percent of all of the children. The guidance clarified that Medicaid patients can participate in clinical trials," said Jessica Rhee, MD, MS, UH Cancer Center's Clinical Trials Office medical director.

"I'm very appreciative to Dr. Peterson, Dr. Curtis Toma, Med-QUEST medical director, and Dr. Rhee for working so diligently and collaboratively to create a policy that addresses the needs of some of the most vulnerable cancer patients in Hawai'i," said Dr. Randall Holcombe, UH Cancer Center director. "This is an effort supported by multiple state legislators and healthcare organizations."

Med-QUEST cancer patients in Hawai'i receive coverage for routine care costs such as doctors' visits and laboratory tests. Unlike Medicare and private insurance, Med-QUEST is not federally required to cover these routine care costs for cancer patients participating in clinical trials. This policy guidance will ensure equal access to the best treatments available on clinical trials for Med-QUEST cancer patients.

For more information about UH Cancer Center clinical trials call (808) 586-2979.

Native Hawaiian men's study highlights culturally grounded prevention efforts

The study results of the UH Cancer Center's No Ke Ola Pono to Nā Kāne (for the good health of men) project, conducted statewide in Hawai'i to promote health improvements in Native Hawaiian kāne (men) through culturally grounded approaches was published in the American Journal of Men's Health.

The study perpetuated Native Hawaiian traditional practices of hale mua (men's house) and community hui kūkākūkā (discussion groups) to promote healthy behaviors among kāne. The study also emphasized colon cancer prevention strategies such as using the fecal immunochemical test (FIT). Trained Native Hawaiian kāne volunteers conducted discussion groups using educational materials to guide sessions.

In partnership with Ke Ola Mamo, O'ahu's Native Hawaiian Health Care System, 378 kāne were recruited into the study from 2014 to 2018, and 232 participated in the colorectal discussion groups.

“Early and regular screening for precancerous colon lesions can prevent nearly 90 percent of colon cancers. Our

study results show that introducing FIT to kāne through community hui kūkākūkā may help fight the disease among kāne,” said Kevin Cassel, DrPH, study principal investigator and UH Cancer Center assistant researcher.

The study highlights that in Hawai'i Native Hawaiians bear disproportionately higher rates of chronic illnesses including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and cancer compared to the overall state population. In addition, many Native Hawaiians live in rural communities where health care and recreation services are meager, distant or non-existent.

“The culturally-based traditions of the hale mua and community hui kūkākūkā can be the foundation to address health disparities among kāne. It is important to continue future studies to explore these culturally-based approaches,

and extend group discussion topics addressing health issues relevant to Native Hawaiian men,” said Nathan Wong, MD, study kauka (physician) and UH Cancer Center Native Hawaiian Community Advisory Board member.



Left to right: Vernon Viernes, Kevin Cassel, DrPH, Mike Ikeda, Ryan Edayan and Jason Kalawe.

Count Me In studies relationship between genes and cancer

Count Me In (CMI) was introduced at the UH Cancer Center's 2019 Quest for a Cure: Progress in Cancer Research event on genetics and cancer by two visiting scientists, Eliezer Van Allen, MD, and Alexander “Scanner” Cheung, MBH, with the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Broad Institute at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard.

CMI is a patient-partnered and -empowered non-profit research organization. Its mission is to discover the relationship between genes and cancer. Currently CMI conducts research on angiosarcoma and esophageal, stomach and metastatic breast and metastatic prostate cancers with the future goal of including other cancers.

Van Allen and Cheung emphasized the need for participation by patients of diverse ethnicities to expand global understanding of how genetic differences are related to cancer causation and patients' responses to treatments. They expressed hope that Hawai'i residents will join CMI studies because of the state's diverse ethnic population.

To learn more about CMI research visit www.uhcancercenter.org/research/cancer-genetics.



Innovations is a community publication of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center, produced with support from the Friends of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center. If you have comments or suggestions, please call 808-586-3010 or visit www.uhcancercenter.org.

Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA, Director
University of Hawai'i Cancer Center

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Sharon Shigemasa, RN, MS – Editor
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Preventing Cancers through HPV Vaccination

Beginning fall 2020, all Hawai'i students entering the 7th grade must provide documentation that they have received Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Tdap (tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis) and MCV (meningococcal conjugate) vaccinations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends HPV vaccination for all preteens at age 11 or 12 years. Studies indicate that younger adolescents produce a stronger immune response to the vaccine than older adolescents and young adults.

HPV is a group of more than 200 related viruses. Most are low-risk types and typically cause no disease, but 14 high-risk types can cause genital, anal and oropharyngeal cancers. HPV infections are very common, and nearly all men and women will get at least one type of HPV sometime in their lives. In the U.S. about 14 million people, including teens, become infected with HPV each year with about half of new infections occurring among persons age 15 to 24 years. Infection with high-risk HPV types can persist and cause cancers many years later. In Hawai'i, an estimated total



of 155 HPV-associated cancers were reported each year between 2011-2015, and of these approximately 112 could have been prevented each year with the HPV vaccine.

HPV vaccines are safe and effective, provide close to 100 percent protection against HPV precancers. and are best given prior to exposure to HPV. The vaccine has a safety record backed by 12 years of monitoring and research. Since the vaccine was first recommended in 2006, HPV infections and precancers have significantly decreased.

The UH Cancer Center is actively engaged in the Hawai'i Comprehensive Cancer (HCC) Coalition's Vaccine-Preventable Cancers (VPC) Workgroup that was instrumental in updating the statewide immunization requirements policy (Hawai'i Administrative Rule (HAR) Title 11, Chapter 157). "HPV vaccination is an important tool for cancer prevention. Widespread vaccination of school-age children will reduce their risk of cancer as adults," states UH Cancer Center researcher Brenda Hernandez, PhD, MPH, VPC member and HCC Coalition chair.