News Releases

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International symposium explores genetic link to mesothelioma and other cancers
Experts will identify clinical strategies for early detection and treatment

HONOLULU – The University of Hawaii Cancer Center and The Queen’s Medical Center will host an international symposium on Friday, December 2, 2011 to discuss new information related to the recent discovery of the BAP1 genetic mutation and its link to mesothelioma, melanoma and potentially other cancers.

The Third Annual Translational Cancer Medicine Symposium will feature more than 20 global experts in cancer genetics including keynote speaker, Carlo M. Croce, M.D., Director of the Human Cancer Genetics Program of The Ohio State University; Joseph Testa, Ph.D., Director of the Genomics Facility at Fox Chase Cancer Center; and Michele Carbone, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the University of Hawaii Cancer Center whose research team announced in August its discovery of the BAP1 gene mutation’s link to mesothelioma and other cancers. “We are excited to bring these experts to Hawaii to work together to find ways to reduce the suffering and death from cancers caused by this mutation,” said Carbone.

The BAP1 cancer syndrome is caused by inherited mutations of the BAP1 gene. Carriers of the BAP1 mutation can develop mesothelioma, uveal melanoma, melanocytic tumors and other carcinomas. When individuals with the BAP1 mutation are exposed to asbestos or erionite, mesothelioma appears to predominate and may be the cause of death in 50% of family members. This discovery provides physicians with a new tool to identify individuals at very high risk of developing these types of cancers. The study on the BAP1 discovery was published online August 28, 2011, in Nature Genetics.

Mesothelioma tumors are typically associated with asbestos and erionite exposure. Erionite, a naturally occurring mineral fiber similar to asbestos, is found in rock formations and volcanic ash. A small fraction of individuals exposed to erionite or asbestos actually develop mesothelioma, one of the deadliest forms of cancer that kills about 3,000 people each year in the United States, with half of those diagnosed dying within one year. Rates of new cases of mesothelioma in parts of the world, including Europe and China, have risen steadily over the past decade.

Funding for this event is provided by the Weinman Foundation’s Innovators in Cancer Research Fund. This Fund was established in 2008 for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center by Barry and Virginia Weinman to promote translational cancer research aimed at moving cancer research findings to the patient’s bedside. The Fund brings prominent leaders in cancer research to Hawaii each year to
establish research collaborations with the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and members of the University of Hawaii Cancer Consortium.

The event is intended for researchers and healthcare professionals, and the cost for attendance is $40. For more information or to register call (808) 691-4406 or email at cme@queens.org.