June 23, 2011

University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center Receives $3.58 Million Gift for Mesothelioma Research
Funds will forward scientific advances for one of the most difficult to treat cancers

HONOLULU – The UH Cancer Center has received a $3.58 million gift from an anonymous donor to support the mesothelioma research of Dr. Michele Carbone, director of the UH Cancer Center. Carbone and colleagues, who include Drs. Haining Yang and Giovanni Gaudino, have made a series of recent scientific breakthroughs that will lead to new ways to prevent and treat the disease.

"This generous gift is critical to support our efforts to generate discoveries that will aid in the prevention of mesothelioma and the development of new therapies," said Dr. Carbone. Mesothelioma is a cancer of the cells that line the chest and abdominal cavities. It results in one of the most aggressive types of tumors, and current median survival from diagnosis is just twelve months. Exposure to airborne asbestos or erionite particles increases one's risk of developing mesothelioma.

The epidemic is caused by exposure to fibers from the mineral erionite, more potent than asbestos in causing mesothelioma

The gift is the second largest in UH Cancer Center history. "Mesothelioma is a serious public health problem," said Dr. Virginia Hinshaw, Chancellor of UH Manoa. "We're proud that Dr. Carbone's team is leading the world in this area of discovery."
This gift validates their efforts and will help them remain at the forefront of thoracic oncology research.”

Dr. Carbone and colleagues have studied mesothelioma for more than a decade. Significant findings have come from studies conducted in the villages of Capadoccia, a region of Turkey. Dubbed "death villages," nearly 50% of the area's residents develop and die of mesothelioma. The epidemic is caused by exposure to a fiber called erionite that is even more potent than asbestos in causing mesothelioma. Erionite is a naturally occurring mineral found in rock formations and homes built of rock material in the region. The team's findings led to a response from the Turkish government that included building the villagers new homes and a regional health center to conduct treatment.

Deadly dwellings in Cappadocia, Turkey

Dr. Carbone and collaborators will conduct a clinical trial co-sponsored by the Early Detection Research Network of the U.S. National Cancer Institute and the Turkish Ministry of Health to validate serum biomarkers they discovered for the early detection of mesothelioma.

This past winter, Dr. Carbone reported new findings describing potential erionite exposure in the U.S. (Nature, Dec. 16, 2010). Collaborating with scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health, they found evidence of erionite in rock materials used to pave roads in North Dakota and other states. Public health concerns have been raised and the team's examination continues in partnership with the EPA. Findings from a new detailed study were presented at a recent scientific meeting and are pending publication in a leading scientific journal. The National Institutes of Health has planned a conference this fall to discuss potential public health issues related to erionite exposure.

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"Private support is essential to solidify the UH Cancer Center's role as the world leader in mesothelioma research," said UH System President MRC Greenwood. "We look forward to furthering our work with donors to help the UH Cancer Center fulfill its vast potential as a transformative research enterprise for our state."