UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I CANCER CENTER AWARDED FIVE-YEAR $5.5 MILLION GRANT TO ADDRESS CANCER HEALTH DISPARITIES

Grant addresses cancer health disparities among Pacific Islanders in Hawaii, Guam and neighboring U.S. Associated Pacific Islands

HONOLULU – The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center has been awarded a five-year $5.5 million grant to support its ongoing partnership with the University of Guam, addressing cancer health disparities among Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i, Guam and neighboring U.S. Associated Pacific Islands.

"This award will support research to prevent cervical cancer, oral cancer and other cancers of regional significance. We look forward to pooling our collective knowledge, experience and resources in our ongoing efforts, together with the University of Guam and with communities across the Pacific region, to reduce the disproportionate cancer burden in Pacific Island populations," said Dr. Palafox.

The Partnership is directed by three renowned senior investigators at the NCI-designated UH Cancer Center, Neal Palafox MD, MPH, Carl-Wilhelm Vogel, MD, PhD, and David Ward, PhD. The focus of the Partnership is cancer research and outreach as well as other activities that facilitate cancer research such as student education in biomedical and biobehavioral research and career development for early stage investigators.

"This award will continue to support the infrastructure and the many research collaborations that we've established over the past 12 years, in addition to providing funds for new and innovative cancer research unique to the Pacific Region," said Dr. Carl-Wilhelm Vogel, founding PI of the UOG/UHCC Partnership.

Research projects funded in the new 5-year cycle (2015-2020) include a health communications study designed to increase cervical cancer screening among Micronesian women in Hawai'i and Guam; an adult betel nut cessation intervention in Guam – the first of its kind; and a study to identify molecular components of Areca (betel) nut that promote chronic inflammation (in the immune system), an important role in carcinogenesis.

Betel nuts are the fourth most commonly used psychoactive substance in the world. Betel nut chewing is practiced by many Pacific Island populations in the Western Pacific region, including Chamorros, Palauans, Yapese and Chuukese, and the practice is growing as Micronesians migrate to neighboring jurisdictions, including Hawai'i where betel nut is available in local retail outlets. Chewing betel nut causes oral lesions and skin changes in the mouth that can lead to the development of
esophageal and oral cancers as well as other diseases. "Our betel nut research is of global and regional importance as study findings will inform future public health interventions and clinical recommendations for betel nut users in the Pacific region and worldwide," said Dr. David Ward.

Disparities in cancer incidence, morbidity, and mortality in underserved populations, including racial/ethnic populations and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, have continued to rise over several decades despite significant progress in other aspects of cancer research. Pacific Islanders, specifically Micronesians, have some of the highest rates of cancer incidence and mortality in the world; cervical cancer incidence in Micronesian women is higher than the national average (79.7/100,000 vs 9.9/100,000).

Many investigators, staff, and research/graduate assistants have contributed to growing cancer health disparities research, outreach and training activities supported by the Partnership. During the past six years, over 60 peer-reviewed manuscripts have been published; nine grants were awarded; 15 master’s students and five doctoral students, including two PhD graduates, were awarded training fellowships; and, as a result of outreach activities, landmark tobacco control legislation was adopted in Guam, most notably tobacco tax legislation which provides approximately $1M in annual revenues to support cancer screening and direct patient services on Guam.

Together with the UOG's award of $4.1M, the combined Partnership award brings nearly $10M in cancer research dollars to the Pacific region. The University of Guam/UH Cancer Center Partnership is one of only 13 Comprehensive Partnerships to Advance Cancer Health Equity (CPACHE), a program funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to develop cancer research capacity at institutions serving underserved health disparity populations and underrepresented students (ISUPS), and to explore factors contributing to cancer health disparities and their impact on underserved and socio-economically disadvantaged populations. The UOG/UHCC Partnership is the only partnership within NCI's CPACHE program that serves Pacific Islanders, specifically Micronesians.

The UH Cancer Center is one of 68 research institutions designated by the National Cancer Institute. Affiliated with the University of Hawai`i at Manoa, the center is dedicated to eliminating cancer through research, education, and improved patient care. Learn more at [www.uhcancercenter.org](http://www.uhcancercenter.org). Like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/UHCancerCenter](http://www.facebook.com/UHCancerCenter). Follow us on [Twitter @UHCancerCenter](http://Twitter @UHCancerCenter).