News Highlights

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UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I CANCER CENTER RESEARCHER RECEIVES FIVE-YEAR $1.9 MILLION GRANT

New grant to study an aggressive cancer that attacks the lining of the chest wall to potentially improve survival for patients

HONOLULU – A University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center researcher has received a five-year RO1 $1.9 million grant to study the growth of mesothelioma, an aggressive and deadly asbestos-related cancer.

The panel of National Cancer Institute grant reviewers said the research, "addresses a very significant public health problem; finding biomarkers for early diagnostic of MM is crucial for patient survival."

Early MM detection leads to better responses to therapy and prolonged survival for patients. Most patients who are diagnosed with the disease live less than one year from the time of diagnosis. Mesothelioma is common in individuals continuously exposed to carcinogenic mineral fibers such as asbestos.

The grant was awarded to investigate families that have a certain gene mutation. All carriers of this BAP1 mutation develop one or more types of cancers including mesothelioma, melanoma, kidney, gallbladder, and sarcoma by the age of 55. Mesothelioma accounts for more than 50% of their deaths.

The proposed studies will determine how BAP1 mutations increase susceptibility to mesothelioma, and evaluate whether a certain protein can be used as a way to help detect the cancer earlier in people considered to be high-risk.

Dr. Michele Carbone, MD, PhD, director of the UH Cancer Center’s Thoracic Oncology Program, will head the research along with Dr. Haining Yang, PhD, an
associate professor in the Thoracic Oncology Program.

"Federal grants are important to the local economy, the money is largely spent locally creating new job opportunities, and it is used to offset the cost of the researchers," said Carbone.

"The grant provides us the means to conduct research to find ways to prevent cancer, or to detect it at an early stage when these patients can be treated and their lives can be possibly saved."