A deadly cancer affecting hundreds of Hawai’i residents each year is on the rise, causing researchers at the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center and physicians at The Queen’s Medical Center and Hawai’i Pacific Health to team up to fight it, something that is happening more often in the fields of medicine and research in Hawai’i.

TeamLiver includes nearly 20 people. With a large Asian population carrying the hepatitis B and C viruses, two of the causes of liver cancer, Hawai’i has one of the highest rates of liver cancer in the nation and the second highest liver cancer mortality rate in the U.S. Every year about 126 people in Hawai’i are diagnosed with the disease.

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Dear Friends,

The support of the Friends of the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center for our wonderful Cancer Center is more important now than ever. When Dr. Michele Carbone resigned his post as director of the Cancer Center in November to focus on his cancer research, I assumed a dual role as Interim Director of the Cancer Center and Dean of the John A. Burns School of Medicine. I am now in the unusual position of representing both longstanding academic health science units based at the UH Mānoa Kaka‘ako Campus.

Both of these organizations provide a strong foundation for Hawai‘i’s healthy future, and both work with major medical centers in Hawai‘i and community practitioners to improve health and reduce cancer suffering.

As I lend my help to the Cancer Center, I must emphasize that cancer research and treatments are of particular importance to Hawai‘i. Every year more than 6,000 of us in Hawai‘i are diagnosed with malignant cancers and more than 2,000 of us will die from this disease. The mission of the Cancer Center is to lead the fight against cancer in the islands and help save these 2,000 lives every year by improving the health of our diverse population through research, education and improved patient care.

The Cancer Center has more than 20 years of accomplishments in this mission to end cancer and to serve the people of Hawai‘i. Looking towards the future, we seek to find ways that we can maximize our resources and partnerships so that the Cancer Center can continue to serve its mission and Hawai‘i’s residents.

I am working with internal and external teams to develop a preliminary business plan for all of our stakeholders—including state lawmakers, Hawai‘i Cancer Consortium members, and the UH Board of Regents. I will work with Earl Stoner and other leaders of the Friends to ensure the input of the Friends. This business plan will outline the value of the Cancer Center to our state, the efficiencies and savings that can be attained through a synergistic operation of the Kaka‘ako Campus (good stewardship of our resources), and the opportunities (both for better health and for economic growth) in Hawai‘i.

Additionally, I am asking for your continued assistance during this very challenging time. There is much great work remaining to be done. We are highly committed to our goal of providing the best medical care possible for the people of Hawai‘i that is based upon strong science of relevance to our peoples.

The next nearest NCI-designated cancer center is more than 2,000 miles away, so truly no one else comes close to doing the job the UH Cancer Center does. Indeed, no one else can do what the UH Cancer Center does in support of local hospitals and practitioners. We are making a difference every year in the lives of our families and friends in Hawai‘i.

Aloha,

Jerris R. Hedges, M.D., M.S., M.M.M.
Interim Director, University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center
Dean and Professor of Medicine
Barry and Virginia Weinman Endowed Chair
John A. Burns School of Medicine
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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The University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center is not in trouble, at least not in terms of its vision and general management, but it does need our help.

All too often major projects that require several years to reach fruition get sidetracked because the several entities responsible for their success change appreciably. This has been particularly true of the UH Cancer Center. The UH Mānoa Administration and Board of Regents have changed substantially. The Executive Branch and the Legislature and its committees have also changed. The directorship of the Cancer Center has changed three times since the original vision for the new building at the Kaka‘ako campus was generated in the late 1990s. This, when coupled with recent bad publicity, has had a negative effect on fundraising, research staffing and many other potential aspects necessary for the center to grow and retain its National Cancer Institute designation.

Both the vision and the reality of the Center plan clearly required a lengthy period of growth and substantial funding to meet their goals. This seems to have been forgotten by many of the responsible parties. Much work has been done, but much remains to be done.

When the Board of Regents approved a $140 million bond issue in 2010 for the construction of the now completed building, this was a commitment of our taxpayer dollars to proceed with the envisioned project. Given that, and the efforts that followed, including the agreement for the Consortium, the hiring of many researchers and their staff, and the continuing work on our NCI designation, we need to assure that this project succeeds and meets its potential.

Some important facts:

First, the NCI Cancer Center Support Grant and the accompanying NCI designation is important not only for the prestige that it provides to our Cancer Center, but because it qualifies us for substantial additional grants and provides us an unparalleled means for growth. Included with the NCI designation is an annual EAC (External Advisory Committee) Review and report that provides pros and cons about the Center, and a blueprint for maintaining the NCI designation. The UH Cancer Center’s EAC is comprised of nationally recognized experts in cancer centers and cancer care from across the U.S. Past EAC reports identified the need for a new single facility, the need to hire more researchers and a qualified director, and the need to develop the clinical component of the Cancer Center. Many of these needs have been met.

Second, all units at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa have secure funding support from UH Mānoa and UH System to amortize the cost of buildings they occupy together with other departmental infrastructure costs. The Center and the John A. Burns School of Medicine are the exceptions. These other University units are not profit centers as in corporations, they are supported by funding from 1) legislative general and special funds, 2) bond issues, 3) grants, 4) tuition and 5) donor funds. A former regent advises that the only true profit center at Mānoa is its bookstore!

Continued on Page 3
What needs to happen? Clearly the Cancer Center is at a point where its success is jeopardized, however it can clearly grow to be the Center that was envisioned in the past. Dr. Hedges and his staff are working diligently to move the Center forward but they need the support of many others:

- The Legislature needs to find and commit secure and permanent funding to cover an adequate core of permanent faculty/staff positions, if building debt service and associated operating costs are to consume all of the cigarette tax allocated to the Center.
- The Kaka'ako Campus needs to be separated from the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa. The School of Medicine and Cancer Center need to be linked to develop utmost operating efficiencies. They need to constitute the “Kaka’ako Medical Campus” recommended to the Board of Regents in 2004.
- A new director and several researchers need to be hired to continue to meet the NCI designation.
- More clinical trials must be generated to better support the people of Hawai‘i and strengthen our relationship with our Consortium partners and clinicians throughout Hawai‘i.
- Any residual disidence within the Cancer Center needs to be resolved internally, given that interpersonal disputes carried to the media improperly tarnish the image of the Center and obscure its good works.
- The Hawaii Community Development Authority could enhance the Kaka’ako Campus and all enterprises in the area by working with the City and County to resolve the homeless problem there.

These steps would secure the future of the UH Cancer Center and the recently honored School of Medicine. Let’s support this task.

Aloha,

Earl Stoner, Jr.  
President  
Friends of the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center

Continued from Page 2

Jeffrey Berenberg, M.D., a long time medical oncologist at Tripler Army Medical Center and professor in the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center’s Clinical and Translational Research Program, recently received the Laureate Award from the American College of Physicians’ local chapter.

Dr. Berenberg was recognized for his commitment to scientific research and medicine. He has a long history of serving the community as a respected practitioner of internal medicine and a contributor to medical education.

Mary Ann Antonelli, M.D., governor of the ACP Hawai‘i Chapter, said, “Berenberg doesn’t rest until he gets answers about clinical problems. He goes out of his way for patient care no matter who the patient is.”

Dr. Berenberg has practiced medicine in Hawai‘i since 1983, having served as Chief of Hematology & Oncology at Tripler Army Medical Center through 2010, and he continues full-time as a civilian physician there.

He began working with clinical trials at the Cancer Center more than 35 years ago. Dr. Berenberg is the co-principal investigator of a $3.8 million National Cancer Institute grant that is part of a national effort to increase access to federally funded cancer research in minority, rural, and underserved patient populations.

“I am honored to get the award. I’ve had a lot of satisfaction seeing the improvement of cancer care through clinical trials and taking care of patients with cancer and blood disease,” he said.
**New Employees at the UH Cancer Center**

Gina Holdorff and Sandra Overton joined the Hawai‘i Tumor Registry (HTR) as data collection associates. They are responsible for the day-to-day activities of the data collection program. Holdorff and Overton also assist with local, regional, and national data collection efforts and the activities of the HTR as a part of the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) program.

Janice Simpson is the HTR’s new administrative support assistant to the registry’s personnel. She began working for the HTR as a temporary hire in the fall of 2014 then converted to a permanent position shortly thereafter.

Ekaterina Kashkina joined the Cancer Biology Program as a postdoctoral research fellow. She is responsible for designing, preparing, and conducting experiments on BAP1 function in DNA damage and repair, and on the implications in tumor suppression and treatment. She also analyzes data and prepares manuscripts.

Yuan-Hao Lee, Manoj Nepal, and Yihang Shen joined the Cancer Biology Program as postdoctoral research fellows. They design, prepare, and conduct experiments on the DNA damage and p53 signaling pathways in tumors, and the implications for tumor suppression and treatment.

Roland Co joined the Fiscal Department as an administrative and fiscal support specialist to assist senior specialists in preparing, reconciling, and analyzing expenditure reports. Roland reviews and processes purchase orders, travel paperwork, and other fiscal documents for compliance with purchasing policies and regulations.

Lois Yoshioka joined the Cancer Biology Program as an administrative and fiscal support specialist. She assists research faculty and staff with the review, analysis, and preparation of administrative, fiscal, and personnel related documents.

Kriszel Guiang joined the Epidemiology Program as the fiscal administrator. Kriszel provides grant support for the Multiethnic Cohort study, and performs data entry, data consistency checks and general grant-related documents work. She also provides research support assistance.

Namrata Gurung joined the Administrative Department as the operations coordinator. She serves as an assistant to the Cancer Center’s associate director and chief operating officer in providing professional level support in planning, developing, and coordinating daily operations at the Cancer Center.

Nana Ohkawa joined the Communications Department as the public information officer. Nana coordinates the media relations activity of the Cancer Center, including preparation of news releases and advisories, event flyers, talking points, web site content, and employee communications. She assists with events and provides communications support for the Friends of the UH Cancer Center.

Shengyan “Cathy” Zhang joined the Cancer Center as the Research, Education & Training Program director. Cathy coordinates major Center-wide educational events such as the annual Weinman Symposium, coordinates the Cancer Center’s External Advisory Committee review meetings, and secures the Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits for physicians for educational offerings at the Cancer Center.

Kamele Bento joined the Cancer Center to assist the faculty and staff with the review, analysis, and preparation of administrative, fiscal, and personnel related documents.

Keith Suyat-Terauchi performs financial services such as ensuring compliance with University polices and procedures and state and federal rules and regulations. Suyat-Terauchi is responsible for fiscal accountability and documentation of procurement/acquisition, receipt, and issue records. He assists in preparation of budgets and research projects and program proposals, including obtaining information from various researchers on the detailed budgets.

Tammy Wolf joined the Cancer Center as the human subjects research compliance director. She is responsible for ensuring compliance with all human subjects-related federal and local regulations and grant/contractual obligations, including reporting requirements. Wolf develops, implements, reviews, revises, and provides oversight of the Standard Operating Procedures and conducts reviews and audits. She also ensures compliance with the Cancer Center’s Data and Safety Monitoring Plan and Clinical Trial Reporting Program.
Search for Cancer Clinical Trials Made Easy

Cancer clinical trials in Hawai'i are now searchable online via the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center’s web site.

People can go directly to http://oncore.cc.hawaii.edu/sip-mobile/sip.html or start from the Cancer Center’s homepage at www.uhcancercenter.org, then click on “Patients and families.” From the drop down menu, click on “Find a clinical trial.”

The site allows a person to search by the disease site alone, such as lung or colon, or with the stage of disease factored in. Clicking on an individual trial link takes people to a page with additional information on that particular clinical trial.

Previously, anyone searching for clinical trials information through the Cancer Center’s web site was routed to the clinical trials site maintained by the National Cancer Institute. Now, Hawai'i residents can easily search for trials that are available locally without having to filter out clinical trials in other states.

The Cancer Center works with Hawai'i hospitals and physicians to give Hawai'i's adult and child cancer patients access to around 100 different national clinical trials of new treatments and technologies in a given year.

Clinical trials in Hawai'i allow patients access to potentially better care, and give them the earliest opportunity to receive life-saving treatment breakthroughs at home where they have the support of their family and friends. Cancer Center researchers are following more than 1,000 patients at any given time.

Anyone who wishes more information on a clinical trial may contact the Cancer Center’s Clinical and Translational Research Services unit at (808) 564-5995.

Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies

The UH Cancer Center was a local sponsor of Ken Burns’ film documentary, “Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies,” directed by Barak Goodman. The six-hour film based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Siddhartha Mukherjee, M.D., aired in segments on PBS Hawaii from March 30 to April 1.

The film interwove an insightful and comprehensive story of the history of cancer, from the ancient days of Egypt up to modern state-of-the-art research laboratories and treatment centers. It followed intimate stories of patients and breakthrough discoveries by dedicated researchers whose tenacity and ingenuity have helped scientists and clinicians gain a better understanding of the complexity of cancer. The film highlighted the progress made in developing new technologies and treatments that have brought us closer to producing lasting cures for the deadly disease.

The Cancer Center sponsored free screenings of the one-hour preview leading up to the airing of the program. Shane Morita, M.D., a surgeon and member of the Cancer Center’s clinical faculty, answered questions on cancer after a public screening co-sponsored by the American Cancer Society and PBS Hawaii.

In addition, Brian Issell, M.D., professor and Center associate director for clinical sciences and translational research, and Cancer Center intern Mari Galiher, a UH graduate student and a survivor of childhood leukemia, talked with the news media about how clinical trials like the ones shown in the documentary were helping people in Hawai'i.

Mahalo to the Mid Pacific Country Club! Marcus Tius, Ph.D. (l), deputy director of the UH Cancer Center, received a check for $13,700 from Wayne Mau (r), president of the Mid Pacific Country Club, at the post-event dinner of the club’s Golf for a Cure Tournament Fundraiser on March 29. This gift represented the initial installment of proceeds raised by the benefit, which was organized by Timothy Dietrich, general manager of the club.

Dr. Brian Issell, a professor and the UH Cancer Center’s associate director for clinical sciences and translational research, talked about clinical trials with the news media, including KITV4. The research conducted by the UH Cancer Center and the organizations seen in Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies has led to more patients surviving cancer today. Mari Galiher, a survivor of childhood leukemia and an intern at the Cancer Center, talked about being in one of the Cancer Center’s clinical trials when she was diagnosed at age four.
LUCY’S LAB CREAMERY – A SON’S TRIBUTE TO HIS BELOVED MOTHER

Cancer affects everyone, directly and indirectly. In 2007, my mother Lucy found a lump in her breast. It was the worst case scenario—stage 1 breast cancer had metastasized into stage 4, littering her body with tumors from top to bottom. For five years, she endured chemo, radiation, transfusions, doctors’ visits, and countless medications. She fought incredibly hard until losing the battle at the young age of 53.

Regardless of the outcome, I’ve never believed that there are winners and losers when it comes to cancer because surviving or dying of cancer is never the end of the story. Even in tragedy, seeds of inspiration can sprout to grow something bigger—hope. As friends shared their sympathies and stories, I began to learn that hope comes in many different packages. Hope could be as big as fundraising concerts performed by the world’s top musicians, it could be as simple as sharing a loving personal memory, or it could be as humble as an ice cream shop.

Having had ringside seats to her fight, I knew that others in the future would have to battle through the exact same hurdles she did, and so I sought ways to pay tribute to her memory with what talents and resources I had. I always had an entrepreneurial spirit and one day it just clicked—why not start a business that can incorporate all of these things that are important to me? With a burst of creativity, a seed of hope, the inspiration to make tomorrow better for others, and a little milk, cream, and sugar, Lucy’s Lab Creamery was born.

I’m extremely proud of Lucy’s Lab Creamery because we’ve committed to donate a portion of our proceeds to support breast cancer research. With each cone we sell and each ice cream cone lick we are doing our part to fight against cancer. Please join me in supporting breast cancer research or any cancer research in any way you can.

Contributed by Lee Wang

Lucy’s Lab Creamery is located at 435 Kamakee St. in Honolulu. If you would like more information on how you can support cancer research, please contact the UH Foundation Development Office for the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center at (808) 586-3050.

FOUR SEASONS HUALĀLAI DONATES PROCEEDS TO FRIENDS OF UH CANCER CENTER

The Four Seasons Resort at Hualālai has donated $15,821 to the Friends of the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center for research use by the Cancer Center. These funds were raised from the resort’s 2014 Run for Hope weekend, which is held each September. The Run for Hope weekend features social activities that coincide with the West Hawai’i Cancer Symposium, a conference for cancer healthcare professionals.

Since 2003, volunteers from the UH Cancer Center have traveled to Kona to work alongside the Four Seasons’ staff and community volunteers who execute the social events of the Run for Hope weekend. They include the Taste of Hawai’i Island Dinner and Silent Auction on Friday evening, golf and tennis tournaments on Saturday, and the Run for Hope on Sunday.

Over the past 12 years, the Four Seasons has donated $246,000 to the UH Cancer Center via the Friends. Monies raised support research at the UH Cancer Center and provide services for cancer patients from the West Hawai’i community.

Contributed by Lee Wang

Lucy’s Lab Creamery is located at 435 Kamakee St. in Honolulu. If you would like more information on how you can support cancer research, please contact the UH Foundation Development Office for the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center at (808) 586-3050.
Wei Jia, Ph.D., a professor and associate director leading the UH Cancer Center’s Shared Resources Program, won the first quarterly Excellence in Research Award in October 2014 for his team’s work on metabolic biomarkers for a particular form of leukemia. The panel of six biomarkers studied by the team has the potential to become a test that could eventually help increase a patient’s chances of survival.


Jia and his colleagues identified a panel of six biomarkers involved in glucose metabolism (breakdown) in patients with acute myeloid leukemia (AML), a cancer of the blood and bone marrow. AML patients are identified by three groups associated with variable disease outcomes—favorable, intermediate, and unfavorable. While the favorable and unfavorable groups demonstrate clear prognoses (anticipated course of disease), the outcome of the intermediate group is not as straightforward, making it challenging for clinicians to treat patients with the most effective drug options.

The biomarkers studied by Jia and his team are byproducts of glucose metabolism in AML cells and most of them are elevated. Jia and colleagues found that about half of the patients studied in the intermediate prognosis group had a low prognosis risk score (PRS) that they created, suggesting that these patients will have poor survival in the intermediate prognosis group.

Jia explains, “It would be valuable to patients for their physicians to be able to use these molecular biomarkers to determine prognosis.” These findings have the potential to help increase patient survival outcomes and create more targeted treatment plans.

Sponsored by the Friends of the UH Cancer Center, the Excellence in Research Award recognizes significant scientific publications on research conducted by Cancer Center faculty. Papers submitted for the award are reviewed and selected by a Cancer Center panel of experts. The award comes with a $4,500 cash prize, of which at least 80 percent must be put back into research.

Among the criteria for the selection of the winning publication are how well the research advances the particular field of study, and how it supports the overall mission of the UH Cancer Center.

CLINICAL TRIALS PARTICIPATION AWARDS

At the Annual Hawai’i Society for Clinical Oncology Meeting in November 2014, three individuals were presented Clinical Trials Participation Awards for their significant efforts in supporting the conduct of cancer clinical trials in Hawai’i. They were Robert Wilkinson, M.D., a pediatric oncologist, who practices at Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children; Diane Donegan, a clinical research nurse at Kapiolani; and Darlena Chadwick, Vice President of Patient Care and Professional Services at The Queen’s Medical Center and formerly the Chief Operations Officer of the Hawai’i Cancer Consortium.

The presentations were made by Jeffrey Berenberg, M.D., Co-Medical Director of the Clinical and Translational Research Services and Principal Investigator of Hawai’i’s National Cancer Institute Community Oncology Program (NCORP). The awards, which included lei, koa plaques, and cash, were generously supported by the Friends of the UH Cancer Center.

Dr. Wilkinson, Professor of Pediatrics and a University of Hawai’i Cancer Center clinical member, was honored for his leadership in pediatric oncology through the Children’s Oncology Group. He is affectionately known in Hawai’i as the Father of Pediatric Oncology.

Donegan was recognized for her work with the Children’s Oncology Group trials. Chadwick was acknowledged for her efforts to promote and support of clinical trials throughout Hawai’i through the Hawai’i Cancer Consortium.
The public is invited to learn about the latest in skin cancer treatment, research, and prevention, and have a free skin cancer screening during a half-day symposium dedicated to one of Hawai‘i’s most common and deadly cancers.

“Insights in Melanoma, a National and Local Perspective,” offers free sessions on topics that include the outlook for patients with melanoma, the latest in treatments for this form of skin cancer, how melanoma spreads throughout the body, and the 20 years of prevention work by the Hawai‘i Skin Cancer Coalition.

A free skin cancer screening will be offered by the physician members of the Hawai‘i Dermatological Society, and a skin cancer survivor will share details of her journey through diagnosis and treatment. This is also the first program for which the Cancer Center will offer continuing medical education credits, or CMEs.

The symposium will start at 8:30 a.m. on May 1 in the Sullivan Conference Center. Speakers include national and local experts, such as:

- Charles Balch, M.D., of the University of Texas Southwest Medical Center;
- Karen Glanz, Ph.D., M.P.H., University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine;
- Michelle Matter, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Natural Products and Experimental Therapeutics Program at the UH Cancer Center; and
- Shane Morita, M.D., an endocrine and oncologic surgeon at The Queen’s Medical Center and a member of the clinical sciences faculty of the UH Cancer Center.

Free parking is available. To RSVP contact Lois Yoshioka at CancerBiology@cc.hawaii.edu.

Melanoma Symposium

The TeamLiver members are opening their doors to each other to make sure they keep each other on the right track. Researchers are learning first-hand about problems patients and clinics face, and doctors are learning more about cutting-edge treatment approaches to diagnosing and treating liver cancer.

“Because the doctors are in the hospital talking to patients, and the researchers tend to be focused on the molecules and genes, sometimes it’s hard to get those groups of people to communicate,” said Linda Wong, M.D., who founded and heads the only liver transplant program in Hawai‘i and is part of this unique team. She has seen nearly 1,000 patients with liver cancer as a transplant surgeon.

“The purpose of sitting together to talk is so that the clinicians can learn about what’s going on at the forefront of research, and the researchers can tailor their research to something that’s going to be clinically relevant,” she said. It’s a collaboration that members say can be difficult, but over time will be helpful to both the researchers and the doctors, and therefore, to the patients.

Junfang Ji, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Cancer Biology Program at the Cancer Center, is excited to continue having real world applications for her research. “We can utilize our results to help patients. With the data obtained we can use them to improve diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment,” she said.

“It’s really beneficial. I think it’s letting everybody have a better focus, everybody sees the big picture,” said Wong.

The team is also trying to connect physicians and researchers from around the world. “Hawai‘i’s multi-ethnic groups put us in a unique position to study liver cancer,” said Ji. The team hopes to make Hawai‘i the bridge between Asia and the U.S. in the fight against liver cancer by being the main meeting place. The team is holding the Global Liver Cancer Conference from May 22nd to May 23rd at the UH Cancer Center.

At the conference, international and local scientists will share their insights on the early detection of liver cancer by finding relevant biomarkers and developing targeted therapies. A panel of physicians will discuss medical and surgical management of cancer. Both sides will discuss ideas to better manage liver cancer on a global scale.

To register, visit
http://www.eventbrite.com/e/global-liver-cancer-conference-tickets-15381183534
Lan Le Marchand, M.D., Ph.D., a professor in the UH Cancer Center’s Cancer Epidemiology Program, and his colleagues identified a common genetic variant, a difference in the DNA sequence, that contributes to colorectal cancer risk.

The findings, published in Nature Communications, provide new insight into the cause of colorectal cancer and a better way to combat the deadly disease. “Our results reveal the role of a certain gene (VTI1A) in colorectal cancer combined with other known risk variables. This may help in identifying high-risk individuals earlier for screening,” said Le Marchand. Colorectal cancer is the second most common cancer in Hawai‘i.

Le Marchand’s study included people of Japanese or African American ancestry totaling more than 11,800 individuals. He believes further work is needed to understand why these two ethnic/racial groups have a high risk for colorectal cancer.

Lana Garmire, Ph.D., received two National Institutes of Health grants totaling nearly $2.3 million. She uses “Big Data,” a way to analyze complex information created by biomedical research in the fight against cancer.

Garmire is investigating if a mother’s weight affects a baby’s cancer risk. She uses cord blood to study genetic signatures in babies born to obese mothers versus non-obese mothers. Using this set of data, Garmire will see if there are already signs that the children are susceptible to cancer later in life.

The other grant allows Garmire to study how cancer cells can differ within the same tumors in patients. The findings can help researchers develop new treatments for the disease.

Michele Carbone, M.D., Ph.D., the director of the UH Cancer Center’s Thoracic Oncology Program, along with collaborators, including Francine Baumann, Ph.D., found higher proportions of women and young adults dying of mesothelioma in two southern Nevada counties including Las Vegas.

The rare and aggressive cancer is more commonly found in older men occupationally exposed to asbestos, suggesting that naturally occurring mineral fibers in that region are a contributing source of the cancers.

The findings, published in the Journal of Thoracic Oncology, highlight the need for more research to find ways to minimize human exposure in the areas where construction growth and dust storms make the carcinogenic fibers airborne.

Scientists at the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center are expected to conduct innovative investigator-initiated research studies as members of one of the 68 cancer centers nationwide to hold a prestigious designation from the National Cancer Institute.

These pilot studies and experimental trials are feasibility studies that are conducted with a small number of subjects in order to obtain preliminary data, and the information may result in launching full-scale studies. Because of this, donors who are interested in supporting pilot studies are being sought by the UH Cancer Center’s Development Office.

Several scientists at the UH Cancer Center have ongoing or pilot studies in the pipeline with funding received from donors. Erin Bantum, Ph.D., and Lenora Loo, Ph.D., are collaborating on a study of breast cancer survivors to understand the impact of hula, a culturally relevant exercise in Hawai‘i, on psychological and physical indicators of health.

Charles Rosser, M.D., M.B.A., is working to develop the technology for a new urine-based test that uses eight biomarkers to detect bladder cancer, which has a high rate of recurrence. He has also developed two clinical trials for prostate cancer, one for early disease and the other for advanced disease with bone metastases.

A trial for the treatment of advanced liver cancer has been designed by Jared Acoba, M.D. It includes an injection of radioactive particles into the bloodstream of the liver to kill the cancer cells, followed by treatment with an oral drug to interrupt the reproduction of tumor cells.

Brenda Hernandez, Ph.D., is studying why women of Filipino ethnicity have a higher risk of thyroid cancers compared to women of other ethnicities.

A study is being conducted by Peter Hoffman, Ph.D., to determine the dosage and effectiveness of a synthetic inhibitor in reducing the severity of inflammation in the colon and the development of inflammation-associated colorectal cancer.

Funding for investigator-initiated pilot studies is an ongoing need at the UH Cancer Center. Individuals who may be interested in learning more about supporting pilot studies may contact the Cancer Center’s Development Office at (808) 586-3050.
Comprehensive Cancer Control in 2015

This Year of the Ram is an exciting year for the Hawai‘i Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition. You may have seen the Hawai‘i Cancer Facts & Figures 2010 and the Hawai‘i State Cancer Plan 2010-2015 developed by Coalition members, including the UH Cancer Center. This year, the Coalition is moving toward updating the cancer plan with leadership from Chair Neal Palafoux, M.D., UH John A. Burns School of Medicine, and Shane Morita, M.D., The Queen’s Medical Center, Vice-chair and incoming chair.

In addition, the Coalition’s Quality of Life Action Team is planning the Journey Together: Cancer Survivorship Conference 2015 set for Thursday, June 11, Kamehameha Day. The Journey Together theme is “Find Your Own Path,” and features a panel presentation; exhibits; a “Finding a Healthy You” corner; and interactive breakout sessions on nutrition, physical activity, and storytelling. An artist in residence rounds out the day’s agenda. Join us for this conference for cancer survivors and caregivers.

If you would like more information about the Survivorship Conference or how to become a member of the Hawai‘i Cancer Comprehensive Control Coalition, please contact Val Yoshida at 808-692-7480.