Waging War on Tobacco

During the last forty years smoking rates have declined in the US. Yet 20% of adults still smoke cigarettes despite the fact that smoking has long been identified as one of the most significant risk factors for developing cancer, and contributes to a host of other serious health problems.

In Hawai‘i, 15% of adults report smoking—one of the lowest rates in the nation. But the outcome is deadly. Each year, more than 1,000 people in our state will die from smoking-related diseases: 495 from tracheal, lung and other cancers, 422 from cardiovascular diseases and 226 from respiratory disease.

In the mid 1990’s, smoking rates among adolescents began to decline. But this decline slowed considerably after 2002 when funding for national and state anti-smoking campaigns was cut. Data from the past two years show that the declining trend has stopped, and perhaps reversed among middle school students. This is a troubling development. Adolescents who start smoking at a young age will (continued on page 2)
Raising the Bar

We begin 2011 with a new name, a state-of-the-art building under construction, and revitalized goals. As the edifice rises, we now must raise the bar on what we can accomplish together in the months ahead.

This will require that we expand our capacity to produce the best possible science in preparation for our NCI grant renewal in September—an essential component in preserving our coveted National Cancer Institute designation. Retaining this prestige and critical access to federal funds demands involvement from each of our faculty, our administrators, and our support staff.

At the end of February, we will again host the External Advisory Board, a panel of leading cancer experts and administrators who advise us on our progress. Obtaining their blessing is paramount to our success. We must convince these mentors that we are prepared to deliver cutting-edge research that is competitive on an international scale. We will continue to build our scientific collaborations with the members of the statewide cancer consortium; The Queen’s Medical Center, Hawaii Pacific Health, and Kuakini Medical Center. Our alliance symbolizes our ongoing commitment to provide the most innovative studies and treatment with our hospital partners while providing access for our patient residents.

Many of our scientists are producing exciting research featured in the leading cancer and medical publications, and some have obtained major grants from the National Cancer Institute. In particular, I’d like to mention Dr. Suzanne Murphy. She was recently inducted into the Institute of Medicine—one of the most prestigious honors for those in academic research. You can read more about her accomplishments in this issue.

While many challenges lie ahead, I am optimistic that we will continue to surmount them on the road to delivering a world-class cancer center that you can be proud of and that will serve our state for decades to come.

Ciao,

Michele Carbone, MD, PhD
Director

War on Tobacco

(continued from page 1)

One of the weapons in the war on tobacco use has been Hawai‘i’s incrementally-increasing cigarette tax. Introduced in 1997 by the state legislature, the tax has proven to be an effective deterrent, raising the cost per pack from $2.60 in 1997 to $7 in 2009.

In 2009, the state legislature enacted another offensive measure—a tax increase on other tobacco products. With adult rates declining, these strategies are working. Unfortunately, certain segments of the state’s population continue to be vulnerable, and smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco remain significant public health concerns.

At the Forefront

The UH Cancer Center is engaged in a statewide effort to win the war on tobacco with community partners that include the State Department of Health, Coalition for a Tobacco Free Hawai‘i, American Cancer Society, and American Lung Association. Central to these efforts are the scientists from the Center’s Prevention and Control Program, led by Dr. Thomas Wills, interim director and noted researcher in smoking behavior and substance abuse. He states, “We’re doing all we can to find better ways to prevent young people from starting and helping people who use tobacco quit.” Dr. Thaddeus Herzog, who has a special interest in smoking cessation adds, “My research indicates that 90% of smokers have at least some interest in quitting. This suggests that many additional smokers could quit if given adequate assistance.”

The Cancer Center is heavily invested in efforts to deter youth from smoking. Faculty and staff conduct joint compliance checks with the Department of Health to cite businesses that make illegal sales of tobacco products to underage youth. The Center also supports REAL, a youth-led advocacy and education program that challenges big tobacco companies targeting adolescents. Alana Steffen, PhD, advises the program. “Youth educating each other about the hazards of smoking has been a very effective method of deterring the start of a dangerous habit. Young people hear the messages more clearly when they are delivered by peers than adults.” (Learn more about REAL on page 3.)
Building Begins . . .
Opening in 2013

Nearly 300 leaders and supporters turned out for the festive ground-breaking ceremony. Under the shade of a large tent, guests heard remarks from some of the Center’s staunchest advocates—legislators, health care executives, cancer survivors, university leadership, and building partners. Keynote speaker was US Senator Daniel K. Inouye, accompanied by his wife Irene. “We will have a first-class cancer center here,” he said. “One that we can be proud of, and one that the nation can be proud of.” US Senator Daniel Akaka was also on hand, testimony to the public support for the project. To view the building progress, visit www.uhcancercenter.org.

Hawai‘i Youth Target Tobacco Industry

A decade ago, 15 young people from Hawai‘i created a campaign to address tobacco use. Focused on exposing peers to the truth about the tobacco industry’s deceptive marketing practices, a counter-marketing movement was born—REAL: Hawaii Youth Movement Exposing the Tobacco Industry.

REAL is open to young people between the ages of 13 to 24. Current membership exceeds 6000 and activities range from organizing events, and speaking with the media and policy makers to serving on a state leadership team. REAL allows members to direct their talents in art, writing, music, or poetry into activism centered on changing social norms around tobacco use.

Over the years, REAL has produced results from helping to increase taxes on tobacco products, to supporting smoke-free workplace legislation. The group has also received numerous honors including the award for National Youth Advocacy Group in 2009 from the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids in Washington, DC; and the Ola Pono Award in 2008 by the Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Hawai‘i. As a program of the UH Cancer Center, REAL is a successful example of how engaging youth as partners in addressing health and social issues can produce positive change.

For more information, check out therealmessagenet.net.

REAL battles tobacco on the streets of Honolulu.
As the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center builds an institution of excellence, many individuals and organizations have stepped forward to generously provide support through donations to the Friends of the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center and the University of Hawai‘i Foundation. Your shared interest and investment are critical to furthering our work to improve the lives of Hawai‘i’s citizens.

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Gary Galiher & Diane Ono

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vital support for promising new projects. While this pilot study exploration can take place, providing funding. Private giving provides a means through which experimental research is often not eligible for federal grant philanthropy.
Betty Funayama has established the Warren T. Funayama Endowed Fund at the UH Cancer Center in memory of her late husband Warren. The $100,000 gift will help support promising research in the areas of breast, liver and kidney cancer.

"Warren came from humble beginnings. It is through his hard and dedicated work that I am able to make this gift," said Betty Funayama. "He was a generous and compassionate man who always wanted to help those who were less fortunate by supporting many charities and community organizations. He would be pleased to know that through this endowment, we will help find a cure for cancer and improve the quality of life for those diagnosed with the disease." For information about gifts to the UH Cancer Center, please call 808-564-5815 or visit www.uhcancercenter.org.
Suzanne P. Murphy Inducted to Institute of Medicine

Becoming a member of the elite Institute of Medicine is the dream of a lifetime for any scientist. For Suzanne P. Murphy, Ph.D., it became a reality when she was honored in November, shortly before retiring from a stellar professional career. The IOM recognizes individuals who have attained an exceptional level of achievement and commitment to service in the fields of medicine, health care and public health. A registered dietitian, Dr. Murphy joined the UH Cancer Center in 1999 and served as director of the Cancer Center’s Nutrition Support Shared Resource. She will continue her work at the Center as a professor emeritus.

Dr. Murphy is respected internationally for her nutritional research that focuses on evaluating dietary intakes. She has served on numerous boards dedicated to setting national food and nutrition policies, and recently chaired an IOM committee to review the food assistance programs for child and adult day-care centers.

“Many of my most satisfying accomplishments have come through my work with the Food and Nutrition Board of the IOM,” said Dr. Murphy. “Several committees I chaired addressed major public health issues, including one that led to new federal regulations to improve the Women Infants and Children Program that serves almost seven million low-income individuals. The opportunity to improve the nutrition and health of so many people has been one of my greatest rewards.”

The IOM is a part of the National Academy of Sciences and is an independent nonprofit organization that works outside of government to provide unbiased and authoritative advice to decision-makers and the public. Election to the IOM is considered one of the highest honors in medicine. There are fewer than 2,000 members worldwide.

Better Nutrition Recommended for Day Care Facilities

Nutrition Key in Cancer Prevention

A recent report issued by a committee of the Institute of Medicine chaired by Dr. Suzanne Murphy of the UH Cancer Center, has made recommendations to improve the nutritional needs of children and adults aged 60 and over who are served by USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The program provides meals to many of the nation’s most vulnerable individuals at day care facilities.

The committee’s recommendations upgrade the program’s existing nutrition standards to bring them in line with the latest dietary guidelines used in other federal food programs. The CACFP serves more than 3 million children and 100,000 impaired or older adults primarily from low-income households.

Specific recommendations:

- Implementation of new meal requirements that promote consumption of more fruits and vegetables, whole grain-rich foods, and foods lower in saturated fat, sugar, and salt.
- Training and technical assistance to providers to ensure understanding and compliance with the new requirements.
- Periodical reviews and updates by the USDA of meal requirements to maintain consistency with current dietary guidance.

According to Dr. Murphy, “The new recommendations will help ensure that program participants receive meals that are nutritionally adequate but not too high in calories. These healthier meals and snacks may help curb the epidemic of obesity in the United States, which is leading to higher rates of many chronic diseases, including cancer.”
Ethnicity Not a Factor in Breast Cancer Survival Rates

Breast cancer survival among Hawai’i patients is not significantly impacted by ethnicity, according to a recent study conducted by scientists at the UH Cancer Center. Led by Dr. Gertraud Maskarinec, the team studied nearly 400 breast cancer patients from Honolulu hospitals, examining adherence to treatment standards, treatment toxicity, pre-existing chronic conditions, obesity and other related factors. Only insignificant differences were noted in survival by ethnicity. Besides advanced stage disease, obesity at diagnosis was a significant predictor of worse survival. Patients receiving recommended treatment had better breast cancer survival overall. High-grade treatment toxicity was associated with worse survival, whereas pre-existing health conditions and older age at diagnosis were associated with high mortality. Conclusion? Given equal access to healthcare, breast cancer patients experience similar survival rates, but weight control is recommended. The study appeared in the January 31 issue of the Journal of Women’s Health.