

## **Addressing Native Hawaiian Health at the John A. Burns School of Medicine**

**Shannon M. Hirose-Wong PhD**

### **Native Hawaiian Health**

Prior to Western contact in the late 18th century, Native Hawaiians were a healthy and thriving community with little threat of infectious or contagious diseases (Bushnell, 1993). However, Captain Cook's arrival to the Hawaiian Islands in 1778 spurred a rapid decline of the Native Hawaiian population. In stark contrast to the healthy and vibrant community of pre-Western contact, poor health and socioeconomic status are constant focal points of today's Native Hawaiian community. Presently, in the state of Hawaii, Native Hawaiians display some of the most discouraging health statistics, including the highest rates for chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and heart conditions (Johnson, B., et al., 1998). Native Hawaiians also have the lowest life expectancy of any ethnic group in Hawaii (Department of Health, 1996), and among the prominent ethnic groups in the state, display the highest mortality rates for major causes of death including heart disease, cancer, stroke, accidents, and diabetes (Braun & Look, 1995; Blaisdell, 1993).

### **Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence**

Efforts by the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to actively address the plight of Native Hawaiians are being implemented by its Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence (NHCOE), which is funded by the Health Resources and Service Administration and the United States Department of Health and Human Resources. In existence since 1991, the NHCOE is now a division within the newly formed Department of Native Hawaiian Health.

The NHCOE addresses its mission, "To improve the health of all Native Hawaiians," by increasing the number of Native Hawaiians practicing medicine; improving retention of Native Hawaiian medical students; ensuring that Native Hawaiian culture, health issues, and culturally appropriate practices are incorporated into the medical school curriculum; increasing the number of Native Hawaiian faculty and Native Hawaiians in academic medicine; facilitating Native Hawaiian medical students and junior faculty research on Native Hawaiian health issues, especially as they pertain to the delivery of healthcare services to Native Hawaiians; and, by increasing public awareness of Native Hawaiian health issues.

### **NHCOE Community Health Research Program**

"...The Native Hawaiian world view is a complex and extensive process which requires an open mind and acknowledgement that most things unique to the Native Hawaiian world view are inadequately expressed through Western theoretical constructs." (Tsark, et al., 1998, p. 229) Educational institutions such as JABSOM have the ability to spark interest, impart progressive knowledge, challenge one's worldview, and serve as catalysts for social justice and change.

Utilizing these concepts, the NHCOE developed the NHCOE Community Health Research Program (NCHRP). With the support of Dr. Kenton Kramer of JABSOM's Office of Medical Education, the Program is offered primarily to first year medical students as an elective in their community health rotation. The program's objectives are to: 1) provide interested students with a basic introduction to scientific research; 2) increase awareness of Native Hawaiian health issues and research opportunities in Native Hawaiian health; 3) provide students with opportunities to conduct original research or work with a research mentor; and 4) expose students to *lapa'au* (traditional Native Hawaiian healing practices). The goal of the NCHRP is to develop future physicians and researchers who have an understanding and awareness of both western and indigenous constructs. This will ensure that future physicians and researchers will be respectful and sensitive to the needs of indigenous populations.

NCHRP is a popular choice among first year medical students because of its novel approach to an otherwise standard research course, the ability to fulfill multiple JABSOM requirements, an opportunity to work with research mentors, and accessibility to subject areas not covered elsewhere in JABSOM's curriculum. Since its inception in 1999, six to eight first year medical students annually have enrolled in NCHRP.

The demand for the program has exceeded the available resources to accommodate all interested students. Medical students not accepted into the NCHRP are welcomed to audit the sessions of interest to them and obtain assistance with their research requirements. Because of the program's popularity among medical students and the importance of this type of program in restoring the health of Native Hawaiians, the NHCOE is investigating additional ways in which to incorporate indigenous medicine, cultural competency, and culturally sensitive research training into the entire JABSOM's four-year medical curriculum.

The curriculum is 9 months in length with weekly 4-hour meetings that consist of lectures and discussion with guest speakers and hands-on learning through participation on research projects. Lecture topics include basic research methodology and design, community based participatory research, and Native Hawaiian cultural protocol. Students are exposed to research and community health partners throughout the year. These partners include Native Hawaiian and non Native Hawaiian health researchers who are involved in Native Hawaiian health research. These individuals serve as mentors and include Native Hawaiian researchers such as Naleen Andrade, M.D. (Chair, Department of Psychiatry), Blane Chong, M.D. (Queen's Physicians Group), Clayton Chong, M.D. (Principal Investigator for 'Imi Hale), Marjorie Mau, M.D. (Chair, Department of Native Hawaiian health) and Kekuni Blaisdell, M.D., noted Native Hawai-

ian rights activist and western trained hematologist. Dr. Blaisdell has been pivotal in incorporating *lapa'au* into the curriculum with a series of *lapa'au* sessions throughout the year. Expert speakers share their knowledge with students on various aspects of *lapa'au* such as *ho'oponopono* (traditional Native Hawaiian conflict resolution), *lomi lomi* (traditional Native Hawaiian massage), *la'au* (traditional Native Hawaiian healing using medicinal plants), and *kahea* (traditional Native Hawaiian healing by calling or prayer).

Through active learning and participation, students incorporate information and knowledge acquired from lectures and discussions into a research project. Upon completion of their first unit (August-November), students will have completed a literature review; by their second unit (November-March), a methodology section; and by the end of their third unit (March-June), their data analysis and discussion sections of their project are completed. The following table lists previous NCHRP student projects by subject category, as well as corresponding research mentors.

The program encourages students to present and publish their research findings. Students have presented at local, national, and international conferences such as JABSOM's Biomedical Research Symposium, Showcasing Diversity: Research From a Multicultural

Perspective at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, National Conference and Exhibition for the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors' Congress. In 2003, a former NCHRP student was awarded second place honors in the JABSOM's MS2 Research Symposium for the project, *Indigenous Popolo, (Solanum americanum) an Investigation of Solanine Content*. Three former NCHRP students furthered their research training by completing the Harvard University Minority Summer Research Program. Although the skills learned through the NCHRP are beneficial to medical students personally and professionally, the program emphasizes the need and importance of communicating findings back to the community with which they did their research as well as understanding the impact of their research on the health of Native Hawaiians.

While the NCHRP provides students with training in scientific research, the strength and uniqueness of the program lies in its commitment to improve the health of the Native Hawaiian community and its holistic emphasis on health and well-being. Students complete the program with the knowledge of how to design a scientific

*See Native Hawaiian Health, p. 57*

Table 1.— NCHRP Student Projects

Research Category/Authors	Title of Project	Research Mentor/Sponsor
Cancer J. K. R. E.	Exploring the Feasibility of Using Retrospective Date to Compare Aggressiveness of Breast Cancer Tumors in Native Hawaiian Women and Women in Other Ethnic Groups	Clayton Chong, M.D. ('Imi Hale)
Cancer A. S.	Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy and the Native Hawaiian Population: Are Sentinel Node Biopsy Results Influenced by Ethnicity?	Laura Weldon Hoque, M.D. (Kapi'olani)
Delivery of Health Care J. H. K. E. K.	Examining Native Hawaiian Health Care: Taking a Closer Look at Native Hawaiian Physicians	NHCOE
Diabetes J. J.	The Correlation between Chronic Renal Insufficiency and Ethnic Background In a Community Screened Population in Hawaii	Marjorie Mau, M.D. (Chair, Department of Native Hawaiian Health)
Lapa'au K. K.	The Effect of <i>Morinda citrifolia</i> on DLD-1 Colon Cancer Cell Lines	Original student project, Use of Kamehameha Schools Laboratory
Lapa'au P. U. A.	Indigenous Popolo, ( <i>Solanum americanum</i> ) an Investigation of Solanine Content	Original student project, Use of Kamehameha Schools Laboratory
Lapa'au L. C. R. Y.	Evaluating the Effectiveness of Kukui Nut Oil in the Treatment of Psoriasis	Original student project, Use of Kamehameha Schools Laboratory
Obesity/Fitness K. P. G. S.	Improving Morbidity and Mortality in Extremely Obese Native Hawaiians Through A Culturally-Based Exercise, Diet, and Behavioral Modification Program	Blane Chong, M.D. (Queen's Physicians Group)
Obesity/Fitness S. N.	Childhood Obesity: A Baseline Study for Native Hawaiian Children	Original Student Project in conjunction with Ho'ola Lahui Hawaii—Kaua'i branch of the Native Hawaiian Health Care System
Psychiatry/Mental Health C. G.	Ethnicity and Psychiatric Admissions, Diagnoses, and Treatment Outcomes	Naleen Andrade, M.D. (Chair, Department of Psychiatry) Psychiatry/Mental Health
Psychiatry/Mental Health T. M.	Cultural Variations in Cancer Pain Expression	Naleen Andrade, M.D. (Chair, Department of Psychiatry)
Psychiatry/Mental Health D. S.	Identifying Characteristics of Subclinical Depression in a Minority Adolescent Population	Naleen Andrade, M.D. (Chair, Department of Psychiatry)

study as well as the limitations of this western approach in understanding the well being of Native Hawaiians. Students complete the program with perspectives on concepts such as spirituality and its importance in indigenous healing practices. By providing a program that introduces medical students to both western and indigenous practices, the NCHRP hopes to develop future physicians who can apply this dualistic framework to their future clinical and/or research practices. In this manner, these future physicians can proactively serve and provide insight into restoring of health of Native Hawaiians.

#### References

- Akau, M., William, A., Birnie, K., Chang, M., Kinney, E., Nissanka, S., Peters, D., Sagum, R., Soares, D., Spoehr, H. 1998. "Ke Ala Ola Pono: the Native Hawaiian community's effort to heal itself." *Pacific Health Dialog* 5:232 - 238.
- Blaisdell, R.K. 1994. "The Health Status of Kanaka Maoli." *Asian American Pacific Islander Journal of Health* 1:116 - 160.
- Braun, K & Look, M. 1995. "High Mortality Rates in Native Hawaiians." *Hawaii Medical Journal* 54:723 - 729.
- Bushnell, O.A. 1993. *The Gifts of Civilization*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring. 1996. *Life Expectancy in the State of Hawaii—1980 and 1990*. Honolulu: R & S Report Issue No. 63.
- Johnson, B., Oyama, N., Marchand, L. 1998. "Papa Ola Lokahi Hawaiian health update: mortality, morbidity and behavioral risks." *Pacific Health Dialog* 5:297 - 314.
- Tsark, J.U., Blaisdell, R.K., Aluli, N.E. 1998. "Guest Editorials." *Pacific Health Dialog* 5:228 - 229.

**FREE & CONFIDENTIAL.**  
4,000 community resources. Available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week. Visit [www.auw.org](http://www.auw.org)

**To find or give help call**  
**Aloha United Way**  
**211**  
A service provided by Aloha United Way.

**Aloha United Way**  
*The way Galu cares. Every day.*

## Classified Notices

To place a classified notice:

HMA members.—As a benefit of membership, HMA members may place a complimentary one-time classified ad in HMJ as space is available.

Nonmembers.—Rates are \$1.50 a word with a minimum of 20 words or \$30. Not commissionable.

### Locum Tenens

**LOCUM TENENS**—FP, BOARD CERTIFIED. Available for short term locums. Dr. Vadim Braslavsky (913) 685-7494.

### Insurance Problems?

**INSURANCE PROBLEMS?**—Experienced Attorney With Insurance Background Will Settle, Litigate, Or Appeal Any Claim. 521-0800.

### Office Space & Support Services

**ALA MOANA BLDG.**—PHYSICIAN WANTED to share space and support services. Interest in physical rehab. preferred. We have unique time-share arrangements starting at one half-day per week. Run your practice with no fixed overhead. Contact Dr. Speers, REHABILITATION ASSOCIATES, 955-7244.

Helping Doctors  
Help Their Patients

### Introducing CHITIN PRODUCTS

- \* Used by over 10,000  
Physicians in Japan
- \* Available in Hawaii  
Since 1994
- \* Learn From Our Experience  
At Your Office  
At Our Seminars  
At Our Office
- \* An Approach To  
Complementary Medicine
- \* Call today for More  
Information



**S·E·A·B·O·R·N·E**

*Life from the Sea...*

1215 Center Street Ste. 220  
Honolulu, HI 96816  
808-738-0993  
808-551-2555