



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
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By
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DEAN
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HB 2506 – RELATING TO RAT LUNGWORM DISEASE

Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Hashem, and members of the committee:

My name is Carolyn Ma, and I am the Dean for the UH Hilo Daniel K. Inouye College of Pharmacy (DKICP). University of Hawai'i at Hilo fully supports the intent of this bill that will address the eradication and treatment of Rat Lung Worm (RLW) Disease.

UH Hilo's DKICP has both a basic science researcher and a pharmacy practice (pharmacist) faculty on the RLW Working Group.

A most recent study (in publication) has shown that Hawai'i Island has the highest *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* infection rates in rats (94%) and in mollusks (*Parmarion martensi*, semi-slugs 77%) in the country and the increase in human infection appears linked to the arrival of semi-slugs. A baseline recent study conducted on Kauai, between March-May 2017 and tested for the presence of *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* (Rat Lungworm), of which 17.2% of semi-slugs tested positive. Our basic science researcher has been active in conducting valuable research.

1. Jarvi lab has developed a 'death assay' to distinguish live from dead larvae. Continued study in this area will help complete studies to determine how effective commercially available vegetable washes or other solutions are at killing infective RLW larvae.
2. Simulated catchment water systems have been initially conducted to test two different size filters in an attempt to filter out infective larvae. However, tests have shown that larvae can still travel or move around certain size filters. Continued evaluation of the possibility of RLW transmission in water is necessary by conducting laboratory and household catchment studies to optimize maintenance and treatment design that prevents RLW larvae from entering household and agricultural water supplies.
3. A pilot study has been completed to determine if a blood-based test can help to diagnose RLW, rather than the current diagnosed procedure of a spinal tap.

Continued study of protein isolates from infected rats will help to evaluate the reliability and validity of such a test.

4. The lab continues to develop ways of reducing larval burdens in rats. Vaccination study was unsuccessful under given conditions. Further study in possibly deworming rats may be a more appropriate strategy.

UHH DKICP Pharmacy Practice faculty has been working with Dr. John Martell in performing a retrospective chart review to better understand the treatment scheme and outcomes of the 70+ cases of RLW that have occurred in Hawai'i. Legislative funding would help to continue this investigation and further study to determine the most effective medical treatment for the various stages of RLW in humans, domesticated animals and farm livestock.

UH Hilo supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our University of Hawai'i BOR Approved Supplemental Budget.