Dear Members of the Board of Regents Committee:

The Queen’s Medical Center (QMC) has had a relationship with the UH Cancer Center (formerly known as the Cancer Research Center of the University of Hawaii) for over forty years. Many Queen’s staff and physicians are regularly involved in research projects sponsored by UHCC. QMC was also instrumentally involved with Kuakini Medical Center and Hawaii Pacific Health in the establishment of the Hawaii Cancer Consortium, whose purpose is to support UHCC’s research program through the recruitment of investigators. Annually, since its formation, the Consortium has committed $2.2 million in support of UH Cancer Center.

As QMC’s president, I am submitting testimony in support of the UH Cancer Center to maintain its NCI designation, which is one of 60 National Center Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers, a unique and prestigious group of research centers in the nation. In 2008 when a major initiative was launched to support the construction of the current UH Cancer Center facilities, the UHCC External Advisory Board made three key recommendations, it felt, were critical to UHCC’s viability as a major research center. They are: (1) Enact the cigarette tax to provide funding to build and operate the new research facility; (2) Develop tumor site-specific research; and (3) Recruit grant-funded investigators to develop investigator-initiated research. The first has been accomplished; the second has been undertaken and is undergoing on-going development; the third as been initiated but as with any major program, requires continuing support. Recruitment of investigators to Hawaii has been by far the most challenging for a multitude of reasons.

Annually, there are about 6,500 to 7,000 newly diagnosed cancer cases in Hawaii. Typically, 80% lend themselves to standard cancer treatments but the remaining 1,300 to 1,400 cases do not readily respond to the standard treatments. These patients need novel treatments and it is a goal of UHCC to be able to develop this capability. UHCC is internationally known for its epidemiological cancer research which identifies incidence and relationships of various cancers in our population. However, treatments must still be developed and it is this capacity that UHCC is working diligently to establish.

Ethnic diversity in Hawai’i is unique. We in Hawai’i face different challenges, as the types and incidents of cancer, as well as mortality rates may not be like those seen in other states. The UHCC is acutely aware of these differences pertaining to Hawai’i’s unique diversity and healthcare needs. The Center’s focus is finding effective ways to prevent and treat cancers that are specific to our community through organized, collaborative and cutting-edge studies. UH Cancer Center also studies natural products from Hawai’i’s endemic biological species to take advantage of the health benefits they offer in ways that include producing new drugs and treatment options.

About 80% of extramural NCI research grants go to NCI-designated cancer centers. Research talent will seek appointments at these centers as the probability of being award grants are typically greater than in non-designated centers. It is to UHCC’s competitive advantage to maintain the NCI designation.

The Cancer Center brings much value to our community beyond what is articulated here and we continue to be a strong supporter of the UH Cancer Center.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

Arthur A. Ushijima
President, The Queen’s Medical Center
Honolulu, Hawaii