

\$12.6M will fund UH health disparities study

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The John A. Burns School of Medicine has landed a prestigious \$12.6 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to study why certain groups in Hawaii have disproportionately higher rates of serious illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

The three-year grant is an acknowledgment from the federal government of the importance of the work being done at the medical school in the area of "health disparities research," said Dr. Jerris Hedges, dean of the school.

"We've been vying for it for two years, and we feel very fortunate to have received it," he said.

The grant comes on the heels of a three-year, \$9.2 million award the medical school received from the NIH last month to fund educational and training opportunities for undergraduates pursuing careers in

UH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Dr. Kapua Medeiros, a 2010 graduate of the University of Hawaii's John A. Burns School of Medicine, examines L'ulani Martin as Winston Kong holds her. The medical school has been given a \$12.6 million National Institutes of Health grant to study why different groups in Hawaii are at higher risk for certain diseases.

the health sciences.

The latest grant will be used to study why certain groups in Hawaii from different socioeconomic, ethnic and geographic backgrounds are at a higher risk for various diseases, Hedges said.

The UH medical school is one of six centers around the country that the NIH has selected to do research on health disparities among different groups in the population.

"Hawaii is such a wonderful place to do this kind of research because it has such rich multicultural and multiethnic diversity," Hedges said.

"The NIH sees Hawaii as the state that is the most integrated and ethnically balanced. It's a bellwether for what is going to be happening on the mainland."

The grant will build on work done by the medical school's Department of Native Hawaiian Health to address the health disparities of native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, "which tend to do worse in many categories," he said. "This is a really exciting time to be involved in such cutting-edge research."

Medical school researchers, led by Dr. Marjorie Mau, will work with community and religious leaders to gain the trust of participants for the studies, Hedges said. The research will then be transferred into "real-life" treatments for patients, he added.

"The goal is not just to publish papers for other scientists to read," he said. "We want to be meaningful to the community. We'll follow up with potential intervention to change the environment and try to improve people's health."