



Na Leo Ola

Newsletter of the Hawaii Medical Association

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Update from Your HMA Public Policy Committee

*by Beth England, MD
PPC Chair*

With the state legislature now actively in session, your HMA Public Policy Committee is currently tracking 40 bills, 21 of which are a Priority 3 or higher. As a general reminder, Priority 1 bills are bills we place full resources and attention to, including a call to action, in-person and written testimony, and possible media involvement; Priority 2 bills are in-person and written testimony; Priority 3 bills are written testimony; Priority 4 bills are tracking only. Bills are selected and prioritized based on our legislative priorities, which are increasing access to care, ensuring quality of care, and expanding behavioral health services.

This session, we have provided over 18 pieces of testimony and are closely monitoring measures that are progressing quickly through the legislative process. **A few notable measures addressing access to care where HMA has provided supportive testimony include HB2544 and HB1675.** HB2544 creates a pilot project within the Department of Health to charter flights for patients from rural island communities (focusing on Molokai and Lanai) to higher levels of care and allows insurers to cover these flights. HB1675 creates an exemption for

the General Excise Tax for physicians acting as primary care providers, which would reduce the financial burden on many independent physicians throughout the state.

As we go to press, both HB2544 and HB1675 were passed unanimously out of the House Finance Committee on February 28th. Also of note, SB1035, Relating to the General Excise Tax and a carryover bill from 2023, is still active, and only needs to be heard by the House Finance Committee. Additionally, given membership feedback regarding challenges with prior authorization and delays in patient care, we are currently in the process of working with legislators to create a concurrent resolution that will mandate further investigation into the impacts of prior authorization on patients and providers. With this additional data, we will be well-prepared to progress with introducing prior authorization reform legislation for the 2025 session.

Several bills relating to quality of care and scope of practice include HB2805, HB2393, and SB760. HB2805 allocates funds for a multiethnic cohort study of the health effects of the Maui fires

to ensure that future interventions and resource allocation are focused on areas of highest impact. This measure was passed unanimously by the Finance Committee. **HB2393** requires insurers to “cover mandated services for mammography at least as favorably as coverage for other radiological examinations”, ensuring that our patients are able to appropriately receive mammography screening. Our testimony supported testimony provided by the Hawaii Radiological Society. This measure has passed through its final House committee, Finance. **SB760** creates a pilot project that grants prescriptive authority to psychologists across the state. The HMA is in opposition of this measure due to serious concerns regarding the safety of psychologists’ independent prescriptive authority. However, there is currently a strong push for this measure to move forward in the legislature. Should it continue to progress, the HMA will strongly advocate for both a sunset for any pilot program, and an impartial review of the impact of this pilot study on patient outcomes by a physician group, ideally psychiatrists.

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President's Message

by Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, FSIR, FACP



Aloha kakou,

For the Hawaii Medical Association, our advocacy is centered on

healthcare policies that support our doctors and patients. Essential to this advocacy are data and analyses that can inform any proposed policy changes. It is particularly important that clinical investigations enroll individuals that reflect the real world multicultural diverse population of our state, in order for policy initiatives to stay relevant and applicable for our citizens.

The need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for research and clinical trials is a topic that has received a lot of attention in recent years, especially given the recent guidance of the Food and Drug Administration on enrollment

of underrepresented racial and ethnic populations.

HMA supports ongoing collaborative efforts like Community First - Access to Care with qualitative analyses of patient challenges. The project is lead by the Hawaii State Rural Health Association (HSRHA), the patient advocacy team of Community First, insurance carriers, and the Hawaii Department of Health. Results have demonstrated significant access to care and physician shortage issues across the islands, and the most recent 2024 focus groups are assessing healthcare needs of Maui. The analyses and documentation is critical in providing policymakers and stakeholders with actionable data, and informing legislative solutions.

An example of similar research is the Maui Wildfire Exposure Cohort Study (MauiWES) that addresses a critical gap in knowledge about the effects of environmental hazards and

socioeconomic challenges on the health of those affected by the wildfires. Local healthcare advocates committed much time and resources to recruit and enroll survivor participants knowing that ~38% of Lahaina's population identified as Asian, compared to 28% for the county, in order to properly represent the distinct multicultural makeup of the Lahaina community.

Beyond the immediate analysis to address the current crisis, the MauiWES study results will inform statewide preventative strategies and improve future disaster response, prioritizing health and well-being in the wake of natural disasters for Hawaii.

HMA will continue to connect with academic and research partners to strongly support population health analyses that inform policy solutions and address specific healthcare disparities for our diverse state.



Perspectives on the Nitta v. HMSA Ruling Thursday, March 7, 2024 • 5:30p

Conversations at HMA is excited to host **HMA Attorney Clay Kekina**.

Mr. Kekina will summarize and comment on the recent ruling by Third Circuit Court Judge Robert S. Kim in the Nitta v. HMSA Court Case. The Kailua-Kona judge denied HMSA's motion to compel arbitration regarding claims in the death of patient Adrian "Scott" Norton. He also denied HMSA's request to dismiss the case of another of Dr. Nitta's patients, Charlene Orcino, and denied the suspension of a civil suit by Dr. Nitta, Ms. Orcino, and Mr. Norton's family, pending arbitration.

If the conversation spurs further questions during the webinar, you will be able to ask them in the Q&A function on Zoom. We will get to as many as possible in the time allowed.

This special edition of Conversations at HMA is limited to HMA Members only, and will be presented in-person at the HMA office and virtually via Zoom. Cost is \$25.00 for in-person attendance, and free virtually on Zoom.

Registration Deadline is Wednesday, March 6 at 5:00 p.m. To register, visit hawaiimedicalassociation.org.

Executive Director's Message *by Marc Alexander*



Plans for Ola Pono Ike 2024 are well under way. The event will be held on **Saturday, October 19, 2024**, in the Coral Ballroom of the Hilton Hawaiian Village – please note the date change. Having requested nominees from the larger community for Physician of the Year, Lifetime Achievement Award, and Community Service Award, our Council chose the following honorees for 2024:

- **Physician of the Year: Whitney M. L. Limm, MD**
- **Lifetime Achievement Award: Thomas S. Kosasa, MD**
- **Community Service Award: John Henry Felix, PhD**

We are very grateful to our honorees for accepting their nomination to these prestigious awards. These community leaders are outstanding role models, having inspired many in the art of medicine and service.

Our Council also chose the nonprofit organizations to be supported through proceeds from Ola Pono Ike. They are:

- **JABSOM HOME Project**
- **Ohana Medical Mission**
- **NAMI Hawaii**

It's never an easy decision to choose from among the many worthwhile nonprofits serving our community in healthcare, for we are grateful to all of them for their support of community well-being.

Many thanks to our physicians and other community members who put forth nominees for our awards and recognized nonprofits. Community matters because people matter!

Public Policy Committee Update

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Our final priority, expanding behavioral health treatment, has several measures HMA supports that are progressing forward- SB3139 and HB1831. SB3139 creates a program within the Department of Health to expand behavioral health crisis outreach services. This has passed through its final joint committee hearing and should cross over to the House. Similarly, HB1831 creates a pilot program for a behavioral health crisis center designed to divert patients with mental health disorders away from the criminal justice system and towards appropriate mental health treatment. This measure has passed through its first of two committee referrals and was passed by the Finance Committee on February 28.

The Public Policy Committee will continue to track these and other measures as the session progresses. Please contact us in case of any questions, concerns, or if you would like to get involved. The more voices and personal stories we are able to provide towards testimony have a substantial impact, and we want to hear from you!

Robert Santry MD, DMin, PhD

**September 12, 1947
January 11, 2024**



Dr. Robert Santry was born on September 12, 1947 in Porterville, CA, the last of three children

to Emma and Melvin Santry. A well-studied individual, Dr. Santry earned his MD in Psychiatry from the Missouri College of Medicine. He also had a PhD in General Psychology from California Coast University, and a Masters in Divinity from the St. Paul School of Theology.

Dr. Santry proudly served 17 years in the US Navy as a Navy doctor and was deployed to Vietnam aboard the USS Mount Whitney. He later transferred to the US Army to serve as a member of the Chaplain Corps. Dr. Santry retired from the military in 2005.

He moved to Maui with his wife, Bridget and served his community as a physician, helping veterans, as a Rotarian, and as a member of the Hawaii Medical Association. He is survived by his wife Bridget, children Elizabeth and Robert, Jr., and stepson Eric.

There will be a celebration of life for Dr. Santry on March 23rd at the VFW Post 3850, 1136 Uluniu Road in Kihei, Maui from 10:00a to 2:00p.



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