

T. Samuel Shomaker, MD, JD, Interim Dean, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Testimony Presented Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
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DAV Hall, 10:00 a.m.

By T. Samuel Shomaker, MD, JD

Interim Dean, John A. Burns School of Medicine

University of Hawai'i at Manoa

"THE STATE OF VA CARE IN HAWAII"

Chairman Craig, Senator Akaka, and members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the relationship between the VA and the University of Hawaii's John A. Burns School of Medicine. I am Sam Shomaker, currently serving as interim Dean, and I am accompanied by a 4th-year medical student, Haku Kahoano.

I am pleased to report that our Medical School enjoys a very strong relationship with the VA in Hawaii - one that is mutually beneficial to our state's veterans and medical education programs.

Residents in Hawaii enjoy the longest average life span of any state in the nation. For that reason, our Medical School has developed especially strong programs in geriatric medicine.

The Hawaii VA hosts medical residents in internal medicine, transitional, psychiatry and geriatric psychiatry programs. At any given time, there are about 16 medical residents and fellows serving in VA facilities here.

Areas of active collaboration between our Medical School and VA include dementia, movement disorders, aging, kidney disease, epidemiology, and telemedicine. More than two dozen members of the VA staff hold appointments as faculty of the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

As Hawaii's only medical school, we bear a special responsibility to prepare students to meet the health needs of our residents - among them our aging military veterans. At this time I would like to introduce one of our students who is both a future physician and a future veteran - Lt. Haku Kahoano is a member of the U.S. Army and a fourth-year medical student.

TESTIMONY BY HAKU KAHOANO

4TH-YEAR STUDENT, JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Chairman Craig, Senator Akaka and other Committee members,

My name is Haku Kahoano and I am a life-long resident of Hawaii as well as a graduate of the University of Hawaii. I had the privilege of playing on the UH football team from 1987 to 1991 and received an MBA in 1996.

I am on track to graduate from the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) next year, and I have accepted a residency in internal medicine at the Tripler Army Medical Center.

You've heard Dean Shomaker describe the many ways the VA helps our Medical School fulfill its mission to create fully functional residents and primary care physicians.

Allow me to add that there is a national health care crisis on the horizon: The reality of the baby-boomers turning 80 and the need to create physicians who are "geriatric" savvy. As the baby-boomers enter this demographic they can be expected to once again redefine the needs of society. The need to create a cadre of physicians who will be able to address issues like (polypharmacy, loss of cognitive and physical function, dementia, delirium, assisted living, long term care, palliative management, etc.) has never been greater.

In addition to its nationally recognized geriatric fellowship, JABSOM now requires all 4th year students to undergo a month-long geriatric elective. JABSOM offers this program in partnership with the VA, and provides tutelage of attending physicians with expertise in geriatrics.

Students gain invaluable first-hand exposure to the care of geriatric ex-military members both in the long term care and outpatient arenas.

I am one of the fortunate members of the Class of 2006 to benefit from this program, and I come before you today to attest to the truly valuable lessons learned from my geriatric experience at the VA.

My 4th-year geriatric elective ambulatory block (outpatient clinic) was conducted at the VA's Spark Matsunaga Clinic located on the grounds of Tripler Army Medical Center.

Senators, thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss the tremendous relationship enjoyed by the VA and Hawaii's medical school, from a medical student's perspective.

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