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Providing Oncology Services to an Island Community

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## Kuakini Medical Center Honolulu, Hawaii

Providing Oncology Services to an Island Community

**K**uakini Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, provides the majority of its comprehensive oncology services to the residents of Honolulu and outlying areas on the island of Oahu.

Serving this island population of more than 860,000 creates a market advantage for Kuakini that few

hospitals on the mainland United States share. "To a certain degree an island state is a captured market," explained Kuakini CEO Gary Kajiwara. "No one is driving across state lines to seek oncology care." While many residents of neighboring islands Kauai, Lanai, Maui, and Hawaii travel to Oahu for medical treatment, only a small number of

Hawaiian residents travel to the U.S. mainland for specialized oncology care.

Kuakini also benefits from Hawaii's unique ERISA-exempt status. Ninety-six percent of Hawaiian residents are covered by health insurance, due to the 1974 Hawaii Prepaid Health Care Act,

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*Kuakini Medical Center originated in 1900 as a thirty-eight bed facility providing free care to Japanese immigrant plantation workers. Today Kuakini Medical Center is a licensed, 250-bed acute care hospital accredited by JCAHO. The Medical Center is a nonprofit subsidiary of the Kuakini Health System, which also operates Kuakini Geriatric Care, Inc., Kuakini Foundation, and Kuakini Support Services, Inc.*

### VITAL STATISTICS

Total hospital bed size: 250  
Dedicated cancer unit beds: 16  
New analytic cancer patients seen each year: 684  
Managed care penetration: 21 percent

### PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

■ Kuakini sponsors the Smoke-Free Class of 2000, a twelve-year public education and awareness program, which focuses on creating a smoke-

free generation of students. The hospital also offers an annual open house to introduce Oahu students to various hospital programs and services. Students learn how to keep themselves healthy.  
■ Kuakini provides an annual three-day oncology course that is

open to the public. Kuakini-sponsored cancer educational programs are aired on local television.  
■ Additional patient-support programs include a speakers' bureau, annual blood and bone marrow donor registration drives, and annual prostate cancer screening.



which requires all employers with more than one employee to provide some level of health care coverage.

In a state where 13 percent of the population is sixty-five years and older, the percentage of Medicare coverage is also high. Medicare patients comprise more than 70 percent of Kuakini Medical Center's total caseload. Four percent of Kuakini's patients are enrolled in the state's managed care Medicaid program.

Despite a managed care rate of 21 percent and rising, most payer reimbursement mechanisms continue to be based on case rates and discounted fees, and physician referral patterns remain strong. Kajiwara does foresee a future with more risk-sharing and capitation, and is prepared for the demands to reduce length of stay and document appropriate use of resources. "Our vast experience with the Medicare DRGs system and its fixed rate of payment per disease will help Kuakini prepare for these eventual realities," Kajiwara said.

Providing effective home care services is a major Kuakini strategy to reduce hospital length of stay without sacrificing quality, according to Kathy Epstein, B.S.N., community relations coordinator for Care Resource Hawaii, the home care agency jointly owned by Kuakini and a partner hospital. In 1996, the two hospitals merged their respective agencies to create the independent, hospital-based home care entity, which has facilitated expansion of services across the island with greater economies of scale.

Merging the programs has resulted in the development of specialty care teams, including rehabilitation and wound care, to ensure that patients receive appropriate care. At the heart of the program

are the home care coordinators based at the hospitals. From the time patients are admitted, the home care coordinators participate in patient conferences and discharge planning rounds and meet with patients and their families to discuss care needs after discharge.

Another major Kuakini strategy to reduce hospital length of stay is the offering of long-term care services through Kuakini Geriatric Care, Inc., a sister subsidiary of the medical center. Long-term care services include subacute care, skilled nursing, intermediate care, residential care home, adult day health, and adult day care.

**COMMITTED TO COLLABORATION**

Kuakini competes with four other major medical centers to provide oncology services on the island of Oahu. According to Kajiwara, the island environment helps keep what would otherwise be stiff competition in check. "Our common physical isolation from colleagues on the mainland necessitates joint collaboration whenever possible," Kajiwara said.

Kuakini's history of joint venturing dates back to the 1980s, with a number of ventures to maximize economies of scale in purchasing supplies and equipment. Recent ventures include Kuakini's partnership with two other hospitals and a radiation oncology group to establish a freestanding radiation therapy center thirty miles away on the western part of Oahu. The freestanding center opened in January 1997. This arrangement has allowed each hospital to share in referrals, with minimal overhead burden, according to Charles Yamashiro, M.D., director of radiation oncology at Kuakini.

Preserving collaborative ties to hospitals on the U.S. mainland has

been essential to minimize the physical distance across the Pacific. Kuakini is the only Hawaiian owner-member of Premier, Inc., a voluntary alliance of 240 owner-members with more than 1,800 affiliated nonprofit teaching and research hospitals and medical centers throughout the nation. Kuakini benefits from group purchasing arrangements and, most significantly, benchmarking and outcomes comparisons with hospitals in non-competing market areas.

Research collaboration is a high priority for Kuakini on local, national, and international levels. Kuakini and four Honolulu community hospitals serve as major teaching and research sites for the University of Hawaii School of Medicine, the primary medical school in the state, which lacks a hospital facility of its own. Through this arrangement, Kuakini participates in CCOP, SWOG, NSABP, and other cooperative studies.

Since 1971, Kuakini has been involved in the NCI-funded Japan-Hawaii Cancer Study, which began as an international collaborative study with cancer researchers at the Akita Prefecture in Japan to investigate how differences in lifestyle affect the rates of cancer in men and women of Japanese ancestry. The study has examined pathological, biochemical, and other risk factors associated with the development of cancer in more than 8,000 men and women who comprise the research cohorts in Hawaii.

A high degree of collaboration ensures that Kuakini is providing the best care available to its patients, Kajiwara said. "Our patients need to be confident that the care we provide equals or even surpasses care they could receive anywhere else." ❏