Three UH Mānoa medical researchers chosen as national mentors: NIH spotlights Mau, Yanagiharas |

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Three scientists at the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM), UH Mānoa, have been selected as role models in their fields by the National Institutes of Health. They join a select few (only 13 across the country) who have been chosen as “BioMedical Faces of Science (BFS).”

Dr. Marjorie Mau, professor in the Department of Native Hawaiian Health, was among the first “faces.” Recently selected to join her as BFS scientists were colleagues Dr. Richard “Ric” Yanagihara, professor in the Department of Pediatrics, and Dr. Angel Yanagihara, assistant research professor in the Békésy Laboratory of Neurobiology, Pacific Biosciences Research Center.

While they work in different research areas, the three Hawai’i “BioMedical Faces” share the challenge and thrill of discovery.

Dr. Ric Yanagihara focuses on vector-borne and zoonotic diseases — “viruses that jump from animals to humans,” he says. For him, science is “a passion to find new things and put them together in a way never thought of before.”

Dr. Angel Yanagihara describes herself as “an old school biochemist,” explaining, “I very much like to know



the chemical compounds that make up living organisms and how they interact. I have a deep-seated passion to really understand how things work." Her research is in toxinology and cell and molecular neurosciences. An expert in box jellyfish, she discovered and patented *Physalia Fluorescent Proteins*, which have the potential to create powerful new tools for biomedical research and diagnosis.

Dr. Mau is founding chair of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health and the Director and Principal Investigator of the Center for Native and Pacific Health Disparities Research. As the Myron Pinky Thompson Endowed Chair for Native Hawaiian Health Research, her research efforts have led to numerous studies on metabolic syndrome, diabetes and heart disease risk factors.

"It looks complicated at first, but really at its roots, science is about discovery," says Mau, a practicing physician specializing in diabetes, endocrine and metabolic disorders. As the first woman Native Hawaiian endocrinologist, she feels it's extremely important for the next generation of scientists to know that if you "dream big" and work hard, the "impossible can become possible!" "Hawai'i is such a special place – a Hawaiian place of learning that brings so many strengths to the scientific community… and it's this special 'mana' infused in its people that makes this the perfect place for 'growing' world class biomedical scientists," said Mau.

Using their capacities to discover new knowledge and apply it to improve people's lives is "a grand opportunity and responsibility," according to Dr. Ric Yanagihara.

The nationwide "BioMedical Faces of Science" program was established to encourage middle and high school students, especially those from minority backgrounds, to pursue biomedical careers that can improve our understanding of human diseases and the public's health. Underserved populations suffer greater risk of illness, death from major chronic diseases and poor health care outcomes, says the NIH, stressing that teams of research scientists are needed to solve these health disparities.

BioMedical Faces of Science features a website (www.biomedicalfacesofscience.com) with biographical videos of the 13 scientists and information about a traveling exhibit that will be in Hawai'i this year.

Photos courtesy of the BioMedical Faces of Science