



# HEALTH IN FOCUS

## NEWSLETTER

1st Quarter 2020 | Issue 5

Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

### FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The newest member of the CHCC Board of Trustees is Mr. Edward Masga Deleon Guerrero. Mr. Guerrero currently works as the Registrar of Corporation at the CNMI Department of Commerce. He graduated from the Chaminade University of Honolulu in 1982 with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, and has since worked in a variety of positions within the CNMI public sector, including serving as the Dean of Administration and Business Affairs at the Northern Marianas College, Secretary of Public Works, and Executive Director of the Commonwealth Ports Authority. Mr. Guerrero also worked as the Chief Financial Officer for the then Commonwealth Health Center from 2000-2004.

### KEEPING UP WITH THE CORONAVIRUS

With all the news stories and social media posts about the novel coronavirus, also called 2019-nCoV, it can be hard to know what to trust or where to go for information. It's important to get information only from sources you know are reputable, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and your local health department.

#### Stay updated!

World Health Organization

[www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/)

CHCC website

[www.chcc.gov.mp/coronavirusinformation.php](http://www.chcc.gov.mp/coronavirusinformation.php)

These organizations also post updates to social media.

### MEASLES: YOU CAN PREVENT IT

As of January 8, 2020, Samoa had reported over 5,600 measles cases, with over 80 deaths - mostly in children under the age of 4 years old. Although there have been no cases of measles in the CNMI, we must remain vigilant and protect our community. Measles is one of the most infectious diseases around today; about 9 out of 10 unvaccinated people who are exposed to the measles virus will contract the disease, and although most people recover, it can cause serious complications. This is especially true for young children, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems who may not be able to get vaccinated at all, such as people undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. These people rely on us to get immunized, which will prevent the spread of the disease through the population even if there is a case, shielding the vulnerable members of the community.

The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is a safe and effective way to prevent measles. It is given in two doses, at least 28 days apart.

- Children should get vaccinated on schedule at 12 months and 4 years old.
- Infants between 6 and 11 months old should get one dose of MMR vaccine before traveling abroad.
- Adults who do not have two doses of MMR vaccine - or if you are not sure if you do - should get vaccinated.

Ask your doctor about options for getting yourself and your family immunized. Adults can get the MMR vaccine from the CHCC Outpatient Pharmacy, which is open Monday-Friday 8AM-6PM and Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays from 8AM-5PM. Call the Outpatient Pharmacy at (670) 236-8798.

You can also get the MMR vaccine at low or no cost to you through the CHCC Immunization Program, located at the main CHCC campus and at the Tinian and Rota Health Centers. They are open from

7:30AM-4:30PM on Monday-Friday, and walk-ins are welcome. The Immunization Program can also give you more information about measles or the MMR vaccine, and check your records to confirm you have both doses of MMR.

- Saipan: (670) 236-8745
- Tinian: (670) 433-9233
- Rota: (670) 532-8700

### MARK YOUR CALENDARS

#### Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

February 20th 7:30AM-4:30PM

The CHCC Community Guidance Center will be conducting a training session on Youth MHFA, which will teach you how to respond to someone in crisis and connect them with help.

Please call Vina Ayuyu at (670)664-4604 for more information and to reserve a spot in the training.

#### Family to Family Health Information Center Open House

February 20th 8:00AM-3:00PM

Marianas Business Plaza, 5th Floor

The F2F HIC is a family friendly, family engaged, and family oriented center where you can learn about health services and resources available for youth with special healthcare needs.

Please call (670)664-8701 for more information.

#### 'Doc Talk' with Dr. Peter Brett

February 20th 6:00PM-7:00PM

Doc Talks are a new semi-regular event aimed at connecting providers to the community. Dr. Brett will be live on the CHCC Facebook page (@cnmichcc) to speak about health and answer questions you might have about cancer.

#### WIC Pop-Up Clinic

February 25, 26, 27 8:00AM-4:00PM (Closed for lunch from 12:00PM-1:00PM)

Tanapag Youth Center

WIC provides healthy food, nutrition education, and breastfeeding guidance to more than 3,000 moms and children in the CNMI. If you are pregnant, a caregiver, or a mom with children under 5, you can get the right personalized support for you and your family.

Another WIC pop-up clinic will be held in March at the Koblerville Youth Center. Please call (670)285-4069 for more information.



The solar power project in the lower parking lot is nearing completion

## DID YOU KNOW?

February is National Children's Dental Health Month! Cavities are one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood in the United States.

The CHCC Oral Health Program provides dental services for adults and children. The dental clinic is open Monday-Friday from 7:30AM-4:30PM and can be reached at (670)236-8369.

## CANNABIS & CANCER, WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW?

By Dr. Peter Brett, MD - Medical Oncologist

As an oncologist for more than a quarter century, I see several hundred patients with cancer every month. Care involves treating, counseling, supporting and listening to them. More than a third of those diagnosed with cancer will unfortunately die from it, and no one escapes its effects on health.

Nearly everyone diagnosed with cancer will ask these questions: How can I make this cancer go away and stay away? How can I get relief from symptoms, such as nausea, pain, and poor appetite? What can I do to improve my sense of well-being?

Now that cannabis will be legally available in the CNMI, many of my patients and their family members will want to know whether cannabis can help or hurt, and how it's used medicinally.



Parts of the cannabis sativa plant can be turned into many products these days, and you can get them into your body in a variety of ways. Cannabis can be smoked, vaped, eaten, and "dabbed" (which involves the flash vaporization of cannabis concentrates applied to a hot surface and inhaled). The plant has more than 100 "cannabinoids," related compounds that bind to cannabinoid receptors in the nervous system. The main two—tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD)—are often put into cannabis products in different ratios. THC is the only cannabinoid that's "psychoactive," causing the euphoria of a marijuana high. THC is also formulated as a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved drug—dronabinol—which has been around for 30 years.

Is cannabis an effective treatment? After a massive review of the current scientific literature published

recently by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, here's the truth as I know it, and how I respond to my patients' questions.

### 1. Do cannabis products make a cancer go away and stay away?

Though there are anecdotal cases of cancers receding with cannabis, there are no major, well-done studies in people that show a general benefit. It's too bad these studies haven't been done, and maybe they will be done some day, but in the meantime, we have many proven and effective treatments for cancer that should be considered first. Nevertheless, at some point in their treatment, some patients will opt to try cannabis products with different ratios of THC and CBD, and I think that's okay, there's little harm in trying.

### 2. Are cannabis products effective in minimizing cancer symptoms such as nausea, pain, and poor appetite?

Absolutely. However, the effect is only mild to moderate. For severe nausea or pain, we have better treatments, but cannabis products often have few side effects, which can be an advantage. It's likely that THC helps best with nausea, but both THC and CBD may help relieve pain and improve appetite.

### 3. Do cannabis products help improve a sense of well-being?

Studies show that patients with advanced cancer can have an improved sense of well-being if they use cannabis that contains THC. However, some people don't like the "high" feeling that THC causes.

Here are two real examples, of patients who used cannabis as a medical treatment, which resulted in different outcomes. (Their social and clinical histories have been changed to maintain confidentiality.)

**Case One:** Patient LS is a 50-year-old woman, a tennis player, with prior sun exposure. She developed a serious skin cancer called melanoma, in the skin of her left arm, three years ago. This was surgically removed, but unfortunately the cancer spread extensively to her lungs a year later. We recommended treatment with immunotherapy (which stimulates immune cells to attack the cancer) which has been approved by the FDA, but the patient opted to try cannabis oil that contained both THC and CBD. Though LS felt a little "spacey" and "forgetful" from the oil, remarkably, the melanoma in her lungs has gradually gone away. Now, two years later, CAT scans show no sign of melanoma, and she's probably cured. It's possible the cancer might have spontaneously improved on its own, but cannabis certainly could have played a role.

**Case Two:** Patient RL is a 60-year-old man, a retired business executive, always in good health. A year ago he was losing weight and experiencing pain. Exam, blood tests, and scans showed he had prostate cancer, and it had spread to nearly all his bones.

Chemotherapy and hormonal treatments helped for a time, but the cancer then quickly got worse. RL didn't try another type of chemotherapy that we recommended, and instead took only cannabis oil with THC and CBD. Although he felt a little better for a few weeks, the cancer continued to grow rapidly, and he recently died.

**Bottom Line:** Though there are anecdotal cases of cancers receding with cannabis, there are no major, well-done studies in people that show a general benefit.

Cannabis will shortly be available legally in the CNMI, and as its popularity grows, there's still much to learn about cannabis as a treatment for cancer.



Dr. Peter Brett is a Board Certified Medical Oncologist. He's been providing full time cancer care for the people of the CNMI since May 2019, along with the rest of the cancer clinical team: Dr. Joel Smith, Dr. John Tudela, and nurses Salome Castro and Maria Priest.

Prior to moving to Saipan, Dr. Brett worked for over 25 years as a full time oncologist in Northern California, near San Francisco. He graduated from Stanford University School of Medicine, and did his post-graduate training at Stanford and the National Cancer Institute.

If you are interested in learning more about cancer treatment and prevention, join us on February 20, 2020 for our second 'DocTalk.' Dr. Brett will be live on the CHCC Facebook page starting at 6:00PM to speak about health topics that are important to the community and answer questions you might have about cancer.

DocTalks are a new semi-regular event hosted by the CHCC aimed at connecting the community with providers who can offer their expertise and advice on health topics. You can watch DocTalks on the CHCC Facebook page (@cnmichcc) at

[www.Facebook.com/cnmichcc](http://www.Facebook.com/cnmichcc)

You will have the opportunity to comment your health and wellness questions during the live event, but can also submit questions beforehand by:

Messaging the CHCC Facebook page,

Emailing [communications@chcc.gov.mp](mailto:communications@chcc.gov.mp),

Or submitting a public inquiry form on the CHCC website at

[www.chcc.gov.mp/contactUs/ContactUs.php](http://www.chcc.gov.mp/contactUs/ContactUs.php).

Please note that this last option allows for questions to be submitted anonymously.

Get the Latest Updates from the CHCC! Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @cnmichcc or check out our website at [chcc.gov.mp](http://chcc.gov.mp)

Questions about the newsletter? Please call (670)234-8950 extension 3359 or email [communications@chcc.gov.mp](mailto:communications@chcc.gov.mp)