

# MEDICAL SCHOOL HOTLINE

## **Hali‘a Aloha no Kauka Elizabeth Tam: In Fond Memory of Dr. Elizabeth Tam from ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka (Association of Native Hawaiian Physicians)**

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*In 1993, the Medical School Hotline was founded by Satoru Izutsu PhD (former vice-dean UH JABSOM), it is a monthly column from the University of Hawai‘i John A. Burns School of Medicine and is edited by Kathleen Kihmm Connolly PhD; HJH&SW Contributing Editor.*

### **Introduction**

We, the board members of ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka (AONK), the Association of Native Hawaiian Physicians, mourn the recent passing of one of our *kūpuna* (distinguished elder) Native Hawaiian physician members, Dr. Elizabeth Tam, former chair of the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Hawai‘i John A. Burns School of Medicine and treasurer of our board. We would like to recognize Dr. Tam’s contributions to AONK by presenting a *ha‘i aloha*, a traditional Native Hawaiian chant, composed by one of our members. The chant references names of winds from significant geographical locations in Tam’s life — from her home in Wai‘ālae to her workplace in Kaka‘ako. These winds are used to describe the far reach of Tam’s influence. Dr. Tam is described as facilitating students’ growth the way that the sun fosters a new plant’s growth. Her research discoveries elucidated pathways to optimal health like a wind clearing a path through clouds. Our mourning is compared with the earth’s trembling during a volcanic eruption; rain represents tears. Readers may view a video of this chant performed by author Dr. Mahealani Lum and an introduction by board president Dr. Emmett Noa Aluli on the ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka YouTube page at <https://youtu.be/VuwSuehjkk>, presented at the virtual celebration of life for Dr. Tam hosted by her family.

AONK is a non-profit organization created in March 1998 by 22 Native Hawaiian doctors at the Native Hawaiian Health and Wellness Summit in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. The organization’s mission is to advocate for the health of Native Hawaiians by providing health education to the community, continuing medical education opportunities for medical professionals, testimonial support for public health-related policies that support Native Hawaiian well-being, and mentorship for Native American Hawaiian pre-medical and medical students.



*Dr. Elizabeth Tam*

### **In Memoriam**

‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka deeply mourns the loss of Dr. Elizabeth Tam, our *A‘ā* (brightest star). Dr. Tam touched numerous lives as a *kauka* (physician), researcher, educator, leader, mother, mentor, and friend. While pages could be written of her numerous accomplishments, here we share our *hali‘a aloha* (fondest memories) of how Dr. Tam made a lasting impact on the Native Hawaiian community and shaped ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka from her first *huaka‘i* (excursion) to her induction as a distinguished *kauka kūpuna* (respected elder physician), a permanent member of our governing board.

Dr. Tam possessed a strong sense of *kuleana* (responsibility) during her academic career. Her personal drive, powerful intellect and business acumen allowed ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka to metamorphosize from a casual checkbook club to the solid financial organization it is today when ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka was fortunate that Dr. Tam brought with her experience as former

treasurer for the Hawai‘i State Rural Health Association. To that end, Dr. Tam guided us through the paperwork needed for taxes and certifications, re-organized our financial bookkeeping, and provided leadership at meetings. She was one of just a few members who underwent traditional Hawaiian protocol training with Dr. Kekuhi Kanahale in preparation for organizing the international Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors Congress in Hilo, Hawai‘i, in 2018 and was instrumental in establishing an endowed scholarship for Native Hawaiian medical and pre-medical students with Ke Ali‘i Pauahi Foundation. In addition, Dr. Tam provided mentorship and spent hours training her ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka treasurer successor. Her hours of hard work balancing the books ensured a seamless transition for what traditionally has been a challenging role.

As a faculty member at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, Dr. Tam also played a key role in mentoring *kauka haumāna* (medical students). Former students and medical residents recall witnessing firsthand the power of her personal touch and calming voice at the bedside. Some say that Dr. Tam treated her students as her own *keiki* (children); she would call to check in, talk about life and ‘*ohana* (family), and sometimes to scold. In addition, she emceed the annual Kihei graduation ceremony for graduating *Kānaka Maoli kauka haumāna* (Native Hawaiian medical students) for the past decade. As a pulmonologist and researcher, Dr. Tam advocated for public policy safeguarding lung health, including tobacco control and the role of volcanic air pollution and respiratory disease in *keiki* (children), ultimately finding little connection between vog and asthma.

In the 1990s, when female doctors were not as ubiquitous, Dr. Tam was a role model for other young *wāhine* (women), especially those aspiring to be *kauka* (physicians). She was frequently featured as a speaker at events that encouraged these dreams. She would later say, “My philosophy in all this is, as a mom, a teacher, and a physician, you get so that people don’t need you anymore. You push for this independence and empower them. That’s my goal.”

Dr. Tam’s vibrancy, beauty, legacy, and commitment to the next generation of healers will never be forgotten. We will remember her as our *Hokuho ‘okelewa ‘a*, our canoe-guiding star. In our times of *kaumaha* (sadness), we need only look up at night to see her: *A ‘ā*: the brightest star in the sky. *Ola mau kou aloha iā mākou*, your everlasting love for us will never be forgotten.

***Ka Maui Ola: He Ha‘i Aloha no Kauka Elizabeth Tam  
Na Kauka Nicole Mahealani Lum***

**The Breath of Life: A chant in loving memory  
for Dr. Elizabeth Tam**

**By Dr. Nicole Mahealani Lum, ‘Ahahui o Nā Kauka  
Association of Native Hawaiian Physicians board member**

Uē kākou me ke ano  
We weep in reverence

Hanohano ka wahine i ke ao  
To honor the woman whose brilliance lit this world

Mai Mānuunu a ‘Ao‘aoa  
From the Mānuunu wind of Wai‘alaie, to the ‘Ao‘aoa wind of  
Kaka‘ako, and beyond,

Aloalo nō kona ‘ike loa  
Her mastery & grace is well-known and cherished.

Anuanu ko‘u ho‘omaka ‘ana  
In the beginning I was afraid, a new plant shoot emerging,

Lamalama i kona ‘a‘ā  
But then I was enlightened and nourished by her warm glow.

Ua ‘ā akaaka  
Shining brightly, as the moon and stars,

Ua a‘o a ‘aka‘aka  
She shared her wisdom with such joy and kind laughter.

Nui ke aloha no ke kānaka  
She had great love for the people she served.

He koa ho‘ōla  
She was a warrior, a healer for our people,

He maui ola  
Giver of life, who breathed life into our people,

He aheahe ihola  
Like a gentle trade wind, a breath of fresh air, coming down  
from the mountain,

Pale aku i ka uahi a pau  
Pushing the stifling haze out to sea, until clear again.

Auē! Ua ahe, hanu pau  
Alas! Just as humbly as she breathed on this earth, she quietly  
took her last breath.

Hanu‘u, hāne‘e  
Ka una honua  
The earth shifted, ever fluctuating,

Ua naue, ‘ā pele  
Trembling, erupting.

Ka makani ikaika  
The winds roar,

Uē ka lani, uē kākou  
The heavens weep, as we grieve

No ka me‘e wahine  
I alaka‘i ai  
For this admired woman who led the way.

E ho‘omālie ē  
E ku‘u hulu, e lele ‘oe,  
Hele mālie ē.  
Rest now.  
Our beloved friend, fly now,  
Go peacefully.

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