February 27th, 2022

American Head & Neck Society

Cancer Prevention Service

Dear Members of the AHNS Council,

Today, we submit this letter on behalf of our project examining the profound head and neck cancer disparities in the US-affiliated Pacific Islands. The Pacific-Islander population is highly heterogeneous, and several smaller groups are often overlooked or underrepresented. It has been well-established that individuals from the US-affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) face severe healthcare inequalities, including a disproportionately high incidence of oral cancers (OC). However, no studies to date have attempted to examine and compare the smaller island populations across the geographic region of Micronesia, which includes the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) – Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae.

The present study is a retrospective review conducted across the USAPI between the years of 2007-2019. Our data was provided by the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry (PRCCR), which is supported by the US Centers for Disease and Control Prevention awards: CDC U58 DP006312, DP000976 and U58 DP003906. The data from this cohort were compared to that from the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance Epidemiology and End Results (SEER). Here, we expected to observe increased incidence rates in oral cancers, particularly around the cheek and buccal mucosa primary sites. We also expected this trend to be higher in jurisdictions where betel-nut (a group 1 human carcinogen) chewing was more prevalent. Additionally, we predicted that USAPI cohort would be diagnosed at later stages with poorer prognoses due to drastic differences in healthcare resources and spending when compared the United States or other affluent nations.

With the AHNS grant, we hope to expand the scope of our current or future projects to include other Pacific populations, pathologies, and data on outcomes. Our mission is to spread awareness of the drastic healthcare inequities that individuals in the outer USAPI face, with the hopes of improving patient treatment and outcomes in the future.

Sincerely,

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